

Nomination Package for Two Heritage Trees

Location: 11 Attri Court, Lafayette, CA

Descriptions:

The trees in question are depicted in Figure 1.

- (1) Canary Island Date Palm approximately 52 feet in height, circumference of approximately 10 feet 4 inches (at 4.5 feet from the grade).
- (2) Canary Island Date Palm approximately 36 feet in height, circumference of approximately 10 feet 5 inches (at 4.5 feet from the grade).

Justification:

Daryl and Julie Chrzan, the owners of the two trees, are requesting that the trees be granted Contra Costa County Heritage status. In doing so, we note that the trees meet the physical description necessary for this designation – both have circumferences greater than 10 feet at height of 4.5 feet above grade. (The minimum required is seven feet.)

While these trees are not strictly native trees, there are three primary reasons that we believe these trees qualify for Heritage Tree status.



Figure 1. Photo of trees considered in this application. The trees are labelled (1) and (2), and will be referenced as such throughout this application.



Figure 2. Photos of tree (1) taken at a time near the founding of Attri Court. The leftmost photo shows the trunk of tree (1) in April of 1965. The center photo is taken from the hill across Releiz Valley Road in March of 1966. The rightmost photo is a magnified portion of the center photo showing tree (1) as it stood there. From this photo, the tree is estimated to be 30 ft. high. Assuming an average growth rate of 0.75 ft./year, one estimates that the tree is approximately 40 years old at the time this photo was taken.

First, the trees are old. Tree (1) was well established in the area before it was populated by homes. The homes that now compose Attri Court were built in the early 1960's, shortly after the 1957 grand opening of Hwy. 24. Tree (1) was already a mature tree in 1965 (approximately 40 years old), based on photographs taken at the time (Figure 2). As of now, the tree has reached a height of approximately 50 ft. Tree (2) is known to be 50-51 years old (based on a photo and comments from our neighbor who has lived in his home for over 50 years), and is approximately 35 ft. tall. Based on the average growth rate of 0.75 ft./year for a young Canary Date Palm tree, and an estimated height of 30 ft. in 1965 (Figure 2), we estimate that tree (1) is nearly 100 years old. The tree has remained steadfast through the roaring 20's, the great depression, the second world war, the civil rights movement, the fall of the soviet empire, and all of the more recent history.

Second, the trees are iconic. Since the large of the two trees was in the land now known as Attri Court since before Attri Court existed, and the second has stood in place for 50 years, the trees have become a landmark for finding the court. Visitors often comment on the majesty of the trees, and in fact, also use them for navigation. If Attri Court were to develop a logo, there is no doubt that these two palm trees would figure prominently in that logo.

Third, tree (1) provides nesting grounds for Barn Owls. The older fronds of the canary date palm grow from the center of the trunk outwards, and droop lower with distance from the trunk. As the palm's leaves age, they droop further, creating an umbrella effect in the center of the tree. For the 28 years that we have owned the tree, barn owls have nested in the tree, sheltered by the drooping palm fronds. We have spent many a warm summer's eve watching the owls learn to fly, and it warms our hearts to see each generation emerge and take flight. (The owls are also quite effective at reducing unwanted pests in the local area.)

As you are no doubt aware, barn owls are classified as raptors, and are entitled to all the legal protections associated with this status. In particular, California Fish and Game Code 3503.5 states:

It is unlawful to take, possess, or destroy any birds in the orders Falconiformes or Strigiformes (birds-of-prey) or to take, possess, or destroy the nest or eggs of any such bird except as otherwise provided by this code or any regulation adopted pursuant thereto.

Specifically, owls are classified as Strigiformes, and are therefore covered by this statute. Destruction of tree (1) would therefore be in direct violation of the quoted Fish and Game code. Declaring tree (1) a Heritage Tree would help to insure that it can remain the home to owls for the entire lifetime of the tree.