

Memo

To: The Atherton Planning Commission
From: Sally D Bentz, Town Arborist
CC: Laylonni Laster, Assistant Planner
Date: April 2nd, 2025
Re: Heritage Tree Removal Application at 170 Atherton Ave.

I have reviewed the application at 170 Atherton Ave. and offer the following observations and recommendations for your review:

In 2024 after the property was bought, I approved 12 heritage trees that were dead or dangerous. The applicant will be required to replace these trees at the end of their project. I denied the 5 trees the applicant is applying for.

The applicant is applying to remove the below trees for the proposed installation of a proposed workshop structure and main house for a proposed full site development.

The applicant requests the following:

Tree #17,19,23,93 and one tree #3 relocated due to the constraints of the site and necessary construction.

Per Arborist report by Kielty Arborist Services LLC on March 31st, 2025

Tree #17 – Coast Live Oak – 30.4” diameter – Fair health, poor structure, decay at union, deadwood.

Tree #19 – Coast Live Oak – 30.5” diameter – Poor health, poor structure, heartwood decay at base, deadwood, damaged roots

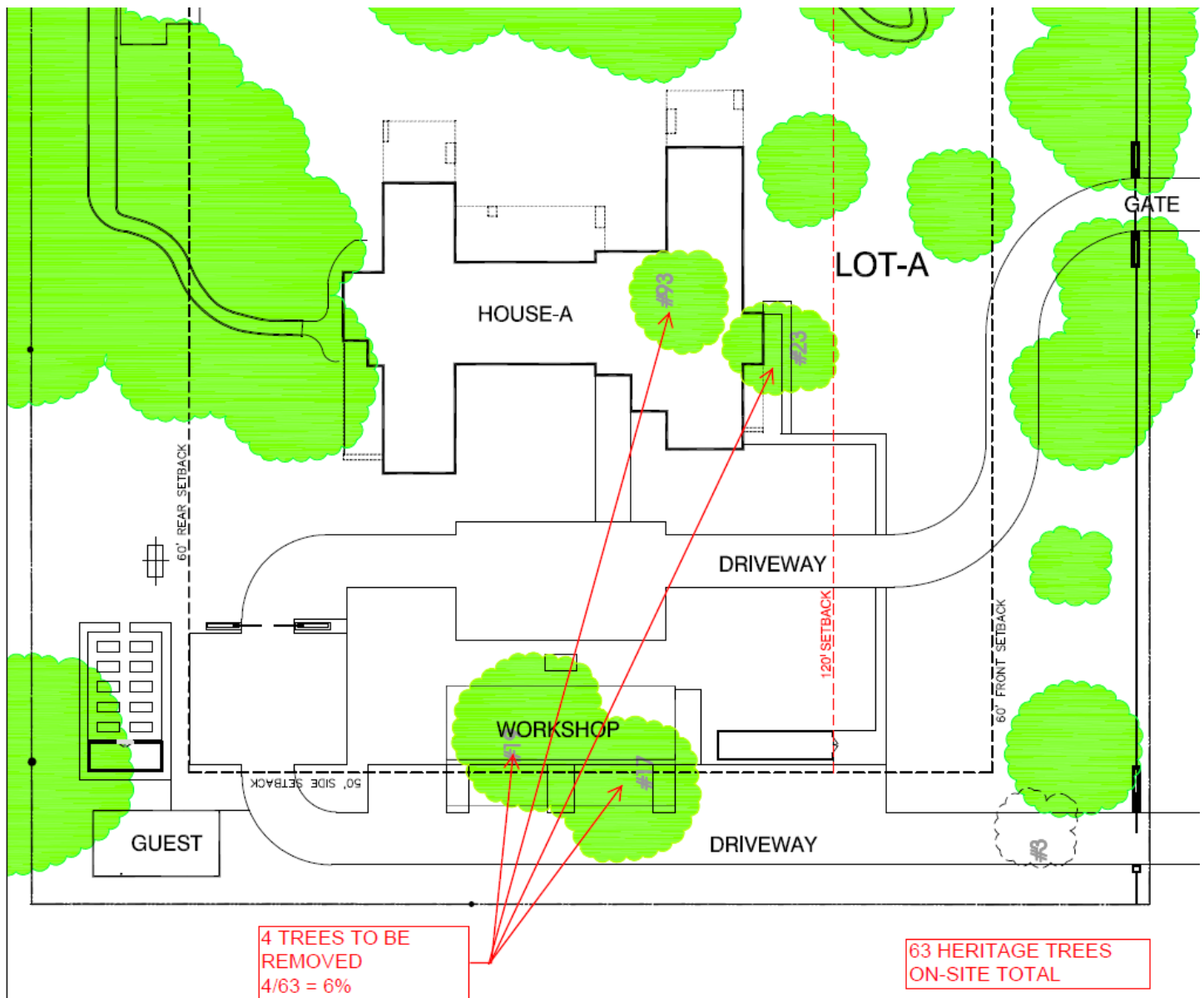
Tree #23 – Coast Live Oak – 16-22” diameter – Fair-poor health, poor structure, codom at 2’ deadwood

Tree # 93 – Coast Live Oak – 22.5” diameter – Fair-poor health, poor form, deadwood, codom at 8’

Tree #3 – Coast Live Oak- 19.6” diameter – Fair health, poor structure, deadwood, codom at grade

TREE INVENTORY SURVEY

Tree Tag #	Tree Picture #1	Protected Tree	Preserve or Remove	Common Name / Scientific Name	Trunk (in.)	Height (ft.) / Canopy Spread (ft.)	Health Rating	Structural Rating	Form Rating	Suitability for Preservation During Construction	Overall Condition (0-100%)	Notes, explanations, descriptions
3		Yes	(P)	Coast Live Oak <i>Quercus agrifolia</i>	19.6	25/26	Fair	Poor	Fair	Fair	50%	Deadwood throughout canopy, near irrigation, compacted soils, codominant at grade.
17		Yes	(R)	Coast Live Oak <i>Quercus agrifolia</i>	30.4	50/35	Fair	Poor	Fair	Poor	45%	Tree leans towards existing home, codominant at 10 feet with decay at union, decay observed along large lateral limbs due to past pruning, cables in canopy, deadwood, hazardous.
19		Yes	(R)	Coast Live Oak <i>Quercus agrifolia</i>	30.5	50/50	Poor	Poor	Fair	Poor	40%	Tree 6 feet from utility lines, heartwood decay at base, overextended limbs, abundance of deadwood, lion's tail, hazardous due to heartwood decay, damaged roots from poor landscaping, hazardous.
23		Yes	(R)	Coast Live Oak <i>Quercus agrifolia</i>	16-22	50/46	Fair-Poor	Poor	Fair	Poor	40%	Codominant at 2 feet, excessive deadwood throughout canopy, multiple cables installed, near over-irrigated landscape, hazardous.
93		Yes	(R)	Coast Live Oak <i>Quercus agrifolia</i>	22.5	46/40	Fair-Poor	Fair	Good	Fair	45%	Deadwood throughout canopy, codominant at 8 feet, near overly irrigated landscaping, hazardous.



Tree #17 – The tree is located where the proposed workshop is located. The applicant is stating it is a public safety hazard. They also state that they are having issues getting insured from their insurance carrier. However, I do not see any proof of this.

Tree #19- The tree is located where the proposed workshop is located. The applicant is stating it is a public safety hazard. They also state that they are having issues getting insured from their insurance carrier. However, I do not see any proof of this.

Tree #23 – The tree is located where the proposed main house is located. The applicant states there is no feasible alternative placement without causing greater harm to other protected trees or making access to the home impossible. Any attempt to shift the house would:

- Encroach upon multiple tree protection zones (TPZs), leading to further removals.
- Create logistical issues with driveway access and emergency vehicle entry.
- Severely impact outdoor usability, reducing garden space and compromising livability.

Tree #93 - The tree is located where the proposed main house is located. The applicant states there is no feasible alternative placement without causing greater harm to other protected trees or making access to the home impossible. Any attempt to shift the house would:

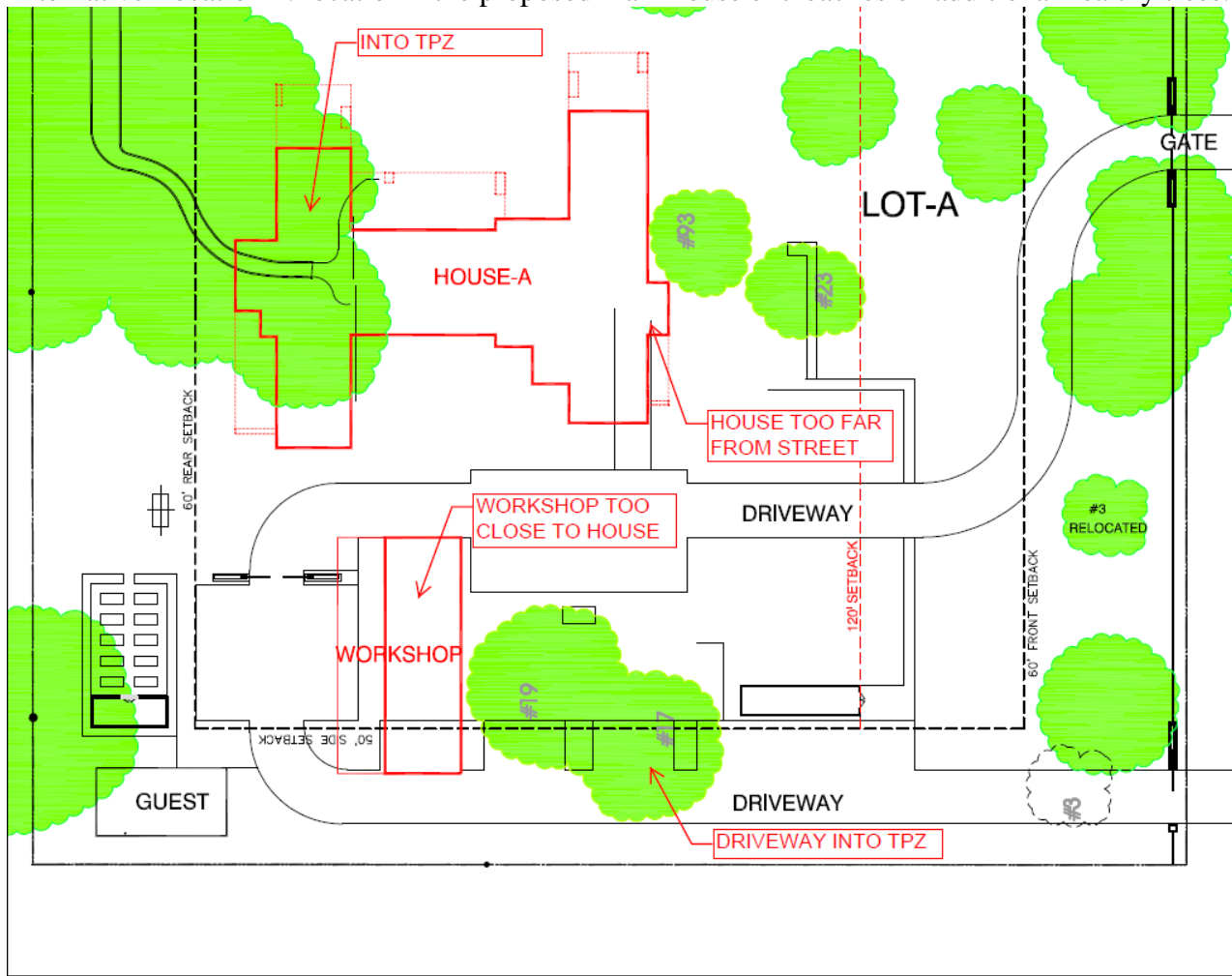
- Encroach upon multiple tree protection zones (TPZs), leading to further removals.
- Create logistical issues with driveway access and emergency vehicle entry.
- Severely impact outdoor usability, reducing garden space and compromising livability.

Tree #3 – The tree is located in the proposed driveway. The applicant says it will move this tree.

Alternative locations

The applicant explored alternative locations. However, they state that after thorough evaluation, it was determined that the proposed design represents the most balanced and sensitive approach. Alternative configurations were found to impose greater disturbance within the root zones of the remaining healthier oaks, potentially compromising their long-term viability. In contrast, the current proposal limits encroachment into critical root areas and prioritizes the preservation of the highest-value trees on site. Based on these factors, we believe the proposed plan is the most appropriate option to maintain and retain the remaining heritage trees while allowing for reasonable site use.

Alternative Location 1: location 1 the proposed main house encroaches on additional healthy trees.

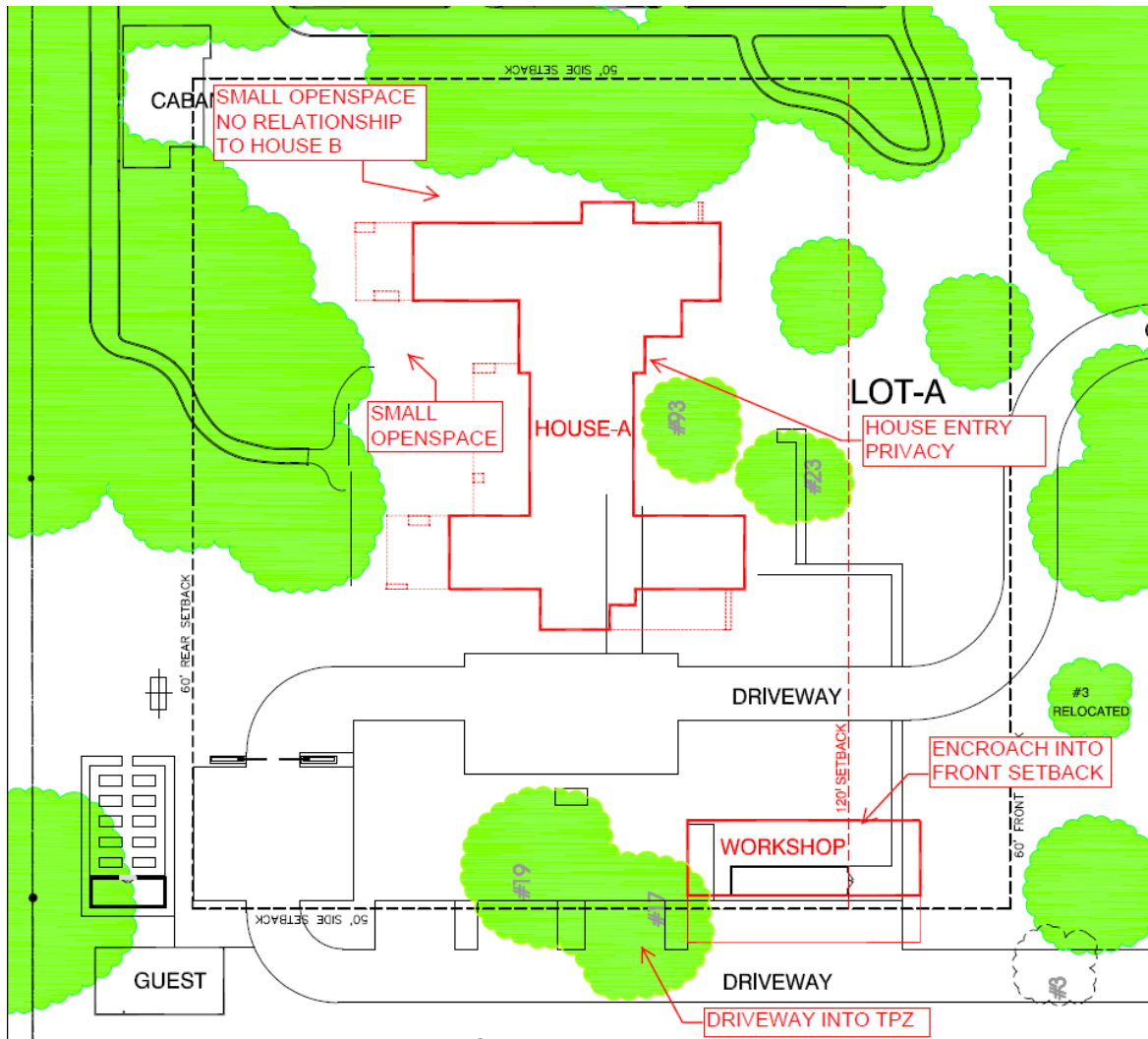


170 Atherton Ave.
03.30.2025

SITE PLAN - ALT 1

B1

Alternative location 2:



The applicant did not address any of the findings below:

Atherton Municipal Code 8.10.040:

1. The probability of failure which is a function of heritage tree and site conditions such as, but not limited to, structural defects, presence of disease, species history, age or remaining life span, and varying weather conditions;
2. The probability of a public safety hazard, personal injury or significant property damage as a function of proximity to existing structures and objects of value and interference with utility services;
3. The number, species, size and location of existing trees in the area and the effect of the requested removal upon shade, noise buffers, protection from wind damage, air pollution, historic value, scenic beauty, health, safety and general welfare of the area and town as a whole;
4. The necessity to remove the heritage tree(s) to allow reasonable use or other enjoyment of the property when there is no demonstrated feasible alternative to the removal while meeting other adopted goals and

policies of the general plan to the greatest extent feasible.

Review:

Workshop:

Tree #17 – The tree is located where the proposed workshop is located. The applicant is stating it is a public safety hazard. The applicant did not show any proof of their insurance being canceled. Also, the existing home will be demoed so it will be a different condition. However, the tree has a heavy lean due to it reaching light and has an unbalanced crown and the tree has decay at the union of the two stems.

Tree #19 - The tree is located where the proposed workshop is located. The applicant is stating it is a public safety hazard. They also state that they are having issues getting insured from their insurance carrier. However, I do not see any proof of this. The applicant did not show any proof of their insurance being canceled. Also, the existing home will be demoed so it will be in a different condition. Per the report from Kielty Arborist Services the additional drill testing showed decay at root crown and at the drill locations.

Although I think the location of the Workshop could be moved. Trees #17 and #18 are not healthy and I can recommend removal.

Main House:

Tree #23 – The tree is located where the proposed main house is located. The applicant states there is no feasible alternative placement without causing greater harm to other protected trees or making access to the home impossible. Alternative #1 would encroach into the TPZ's of multiple trees that would require removal. Per Mr. Kielty, fertilization and soil decompaction measures were completed last year and the tree continues to decline. Multiple cables have been installed in the tree's canopy to mitigate the poorly formed codominant union at 2' with included bark. This tree is not expected to improve with any possible mitigation measures; therefore, the tree is considered hazardous and is recommended for removal.

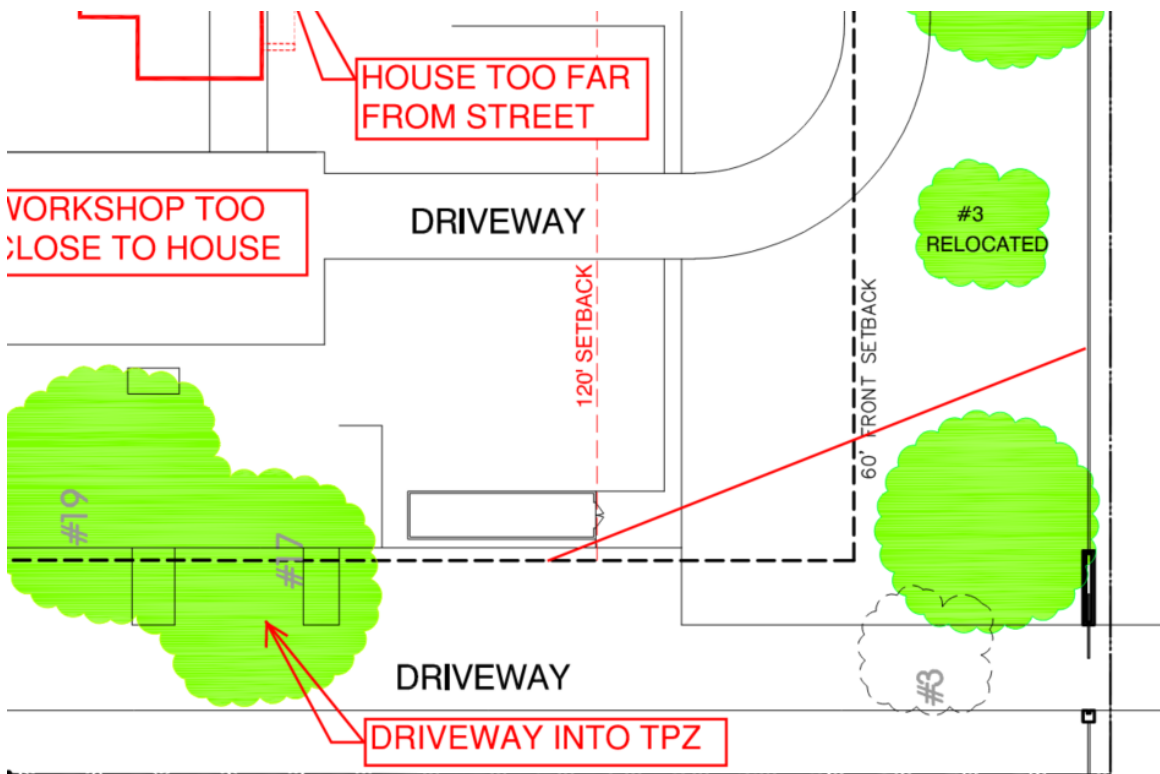
Tree #93 - The tree is located where the proposed main house is located. The applicant states there is no feasible alternative placement without causing greater harm to other protected trees or making access to the home impossible. Alternative #1 would encroach into the TPZ's of multiple trees that would require removal. Per Mr. Kielty the tree is near a once highly irrigated landscape. The tree is also heavy in one direction. No mitigation measures are expected to improve the tree's health, as past mitigation measures including fertilization and decompaction measures have not helped the tree improve. This tree is considered hazardous and recommended for removal.

Driveway:

Tree #3 – The tree is located in the proposed driveway. However, the tree has shown signs of improvement. Mr. Kielty states that following targeted fertilization treatments, the tree has responded well, exhibiting enhanced vigor and foliage density. With its well-balanced canopy and structurally sound form, it is now considered a strong candidate for successful relocation.

For moving tree requests we treat them like removals. If the tree is moved and dies within 5 years, we can assess a fine on the tree. Because the tree is seeing signs of recovery, I do not think it should be moved. I think the driveway location can be moved. Below I marked with a red line where the driveway could be without removing tree #3.

If the Commission wish to grant the moving of the tree than I recommend a condition of approval be that an appraised value of the tree times two would be the fine for if the tree dies within 5 years. Also, a condition would be to follow Mr. Kielty’s recommendations regarding transplanting.



Conclusion:

I have visited the site, and it is a unique property. It has a park like setting with many trees and pathways. The site has 63 heritage Oak trees.

The project team and owner want to preserve as many trees as possible. The architect worked on alternative locations to see what would preserve the healthiest Oak trees. David Beckham with Kielty Arborist Services has worked in Town for over 10 years and states that no homeowner has demonstrated greater commitment to tree care than the one at this property. He said that they are modeling excellence in tree stewardship. I feel like it was important that the person who bought and developed this unique property appreciate and preserve the trees. I do not think there could be a better team for this site.

The team has implemented Mr. Kielty’s every recommendation over the past year, promptly and thoroughly. They have also implemented a 3-year health plan. They are improving soil conditions, enhancing tree vitality, creating sustainable long-term management and preserving and enhancing the health of the remaining trees to the fullest extent possible.

Below are the steps the site has taken to take care of the 63 Oaks on site:

A Science-Driven Approach to Tree Care

Recognizing that healthy trees begin with healthy soil, a comprehensive soil analysis was conducted in 2024, followed by the involvement of a soil scientist in early 2025 to further refine the approach. Initial treatments

included NutriRoot 2-2-3 and Companion Max to improve root hydration, enhance microbial activity, and provide essential nutrients. These applications created the foundation for a broader treatment strategy that has since included TS Pro 14-2-14 for targeted nitrogen replenishment, MZ 23 Fungicide to combat root pathogens, and Cambistat, a plant growth regulator designed to strengthen root systems while improving tree resilience to environmental stress.



Root Crown Exposure and Vertical Trenching: Addressing a Critical Issue

One of the most significant undertakings on this property was the exposure of root crowns on over 50 mature oak trees. Buried root crowns restrict oxygen exchange, promote decay, and encourage girdling roots, all of which can severely compromise a tree's structural integrity. Using an air knife, Colony Landscape successfully exposed each tree's root crown, allowing for improved aeration and reduced fungal risk.

Taking this effort even further, vertical trenching was performed throughout the property, ensuring that compacted soils were properly aerated and amended with high-quality organic materials, including G&B Organics Soil Building Conditioner, compost, and perlite. These enhancements have drastically improved soil structure, increasing water infiltration and nutrient retention while fostering beneficial microbial activity crucial for long-term tree health.

The Role of Cambistat: Strengthening Trees from the Inside Out

Cambistat was strategically used to slow canopy growth, redirecting the trees' energy toward root expansion and increased drought tolerance. This treatment will be particularly beneficial in helping mature oaks establish stronger root systems while reducing the stress of environmental fluctuations. As a result, the trees on site are not only healthier but also better equipped to withstand potential stressors such as drought, soil compaction, and pest pressure.

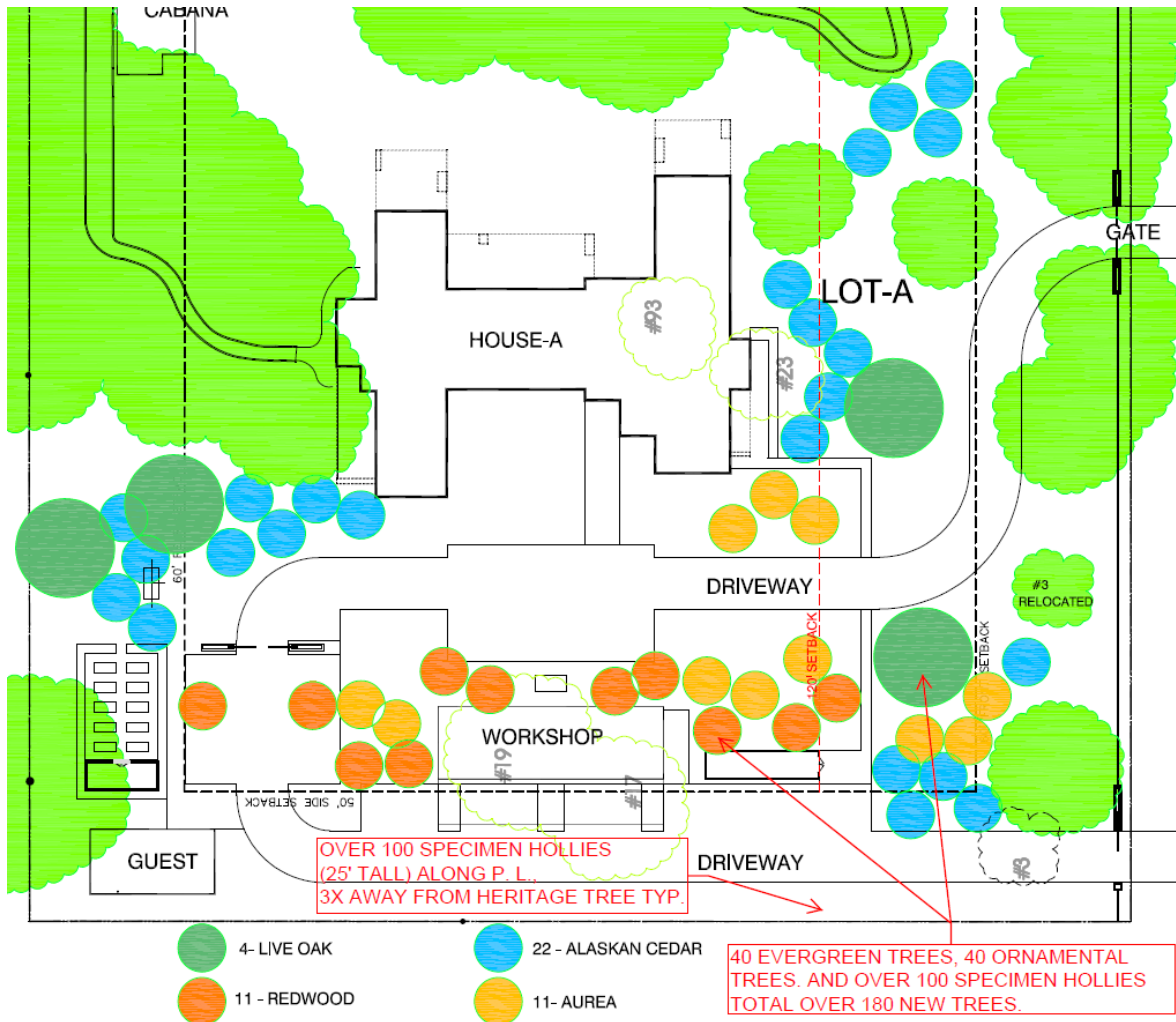
Structural Support: Cabling for Long-Term Stability

In addition to soil restoration and healthcare treatments, multiple trees on the property required structural support through cabling. Trees with heavy lateral limbs or codominant stems were assessed for potential failure risks, and where necessary, dynamic support systems were installed to reduce mechanical stress and mitigate the risk of limb failure. These cables provide additional stability while allowing for natural movement, ensuring the trees can withstand environmental pressures such as high winds and heavy canopy loads. This proactive approach further reinforces the property's commitment to long-term tree health and safety.

With the number of trees on site to work around, the care they are taking in maintaining the rest of the Oaks on site, the replacement plan and that alternatives affect other healthier trees on site I can recommend removal of tree # 17, 19, 23, and 93. However I do not recommend removal or the transplanting of tree #3.

Tree replacements:

At the discretion of the planning commission, for each heritage tree permitted to be removed the permittee may be required to plant three trees of fifteen-gallon container size, two trees of twenty-four-inch box container size, or one tree of fifteen-gallon container size and one tree of thirty-six-inch container size. Replacement trees shall not be those listed as disfavored trees above. Where heritage oak trees are allowed to be removed from within the buildable area, they shall each be replaced with one or more trees of forty-eight-inch container size of oak species at a location approved by the planning commission. The planning commission may also attach other reasonable conditions to ensure compliance with the intent and purpose of this chapter.



The applicant is proposing to plant 100 specimen holly (25' tall), along with 40 significant evergreen trees to screen the home and 40 ornamental trees to enhance the property. A total of over 180 new trees. The holly trees are scheduled for treatment this month to encourage denser foliage and improved overall health, ensuring they establish quickly and thrive in their new environment.

I do not count Holly as tree replacements as Landscape screening around the 3 sides are required. Please be aware that any landscape screening is required to be placed and planted at least 3x away from any existing heritage trees.

If the Commission approves the removal of the 4 trees, then the 40 evergreen and 40 ornamental trees will be sufficient.

The information included in this memo is believed to be true and based on sound arboricultural principles and practices.

Sincerely, Sally Bentz

Town Arborist, Certified Arborist WE#9238AM