

Urban Forestry Council Landmark Tree Evaluation Form and Criteria

Pursuant to Ordinance 0017-06 and Public Works Code Section 810, the UFC has developed these criteria for evaluating potential landmark trees in San Francisco. When evaluating or considering potential landmark trees, please consider the context of the tree within its site location. For example, a tree on PUC land may not have the same community importance that a street or park tree would. Use comment sections, as appropriate, to explain or support evaluation. Attach sheets if more space is needed.

Evaluator's name: Jon Swae

Date of evaluation: July 14, 2015

Scientific name: Araucaria heterophylla

Common name: Norfolk Island Pine

Street address: 46A Cook Street

Cross streets: Geary Boulevard

Rarity Yes Partially No

Rarity: Rare Uncommon Common Other

Unusual species in San Francisco or other geographic regions.

Comment:

Norfolk Island Pine is not necessarily rare in San Francisco as it is planted throughout the Bay Area, but they are not very common and need sufficient space to grow and reach maturity such as this specimen located in a backyard.

Physical Attributes Yes Partially No

Size: Large Medium Small

Notable size compared to other trees of the same species in San Francisco.

Comment:

With an estimated height of 85'-100', this tree appears as a large tree for San Francisco.

Age: Yes No

Significantly advanced age for the species.

Comment:

I am not an expert on tree age. The property owner's arborist report states the age as approximately 70-80 years old (based on a growth rate of .5 inches in diameter per year). On-line research shows that these trees can live up to 150 years. The nominator estimates age as 120 years old per a tree ring count of a similar tree removed on the property. The tree's diameter was measured at 35 inches (110 inch circumference).

Distinguished form: Yes No

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Tree is an example of good form for its species, has a majestic quality or otherwise unique structure.

Describe:

The tree exhibits a healthy mature shape and form that is visible from the street and above the house as well.

Tree condition: Good Poor Hazard

Consider overall tree health and structure, and whether or not tree poses a hazard

Describe:

Observation and arborist reports seem to indicate the tree is in good health with no major structural defects.

Historical Yes Partially No

Historical Association: Yes None apparent

Related to a historic or cultural building, site, street, person, event, etc.

Describe nature of appreciation:

This was one of the most challenging aspects of the evaluation.

The Planning Department’s Property Information Map indicates that the building (built date of 1900 or earlier) located on the parcel is a Type A - Historic Resource. Featured in the book, *Here Today: San Francisco’s Architectural Heritage*, the text related to the subject property reads, “46 Cook Street (c. 1870) George J. Smith, a director of the Odd Fellows, planted his estate with many trees which he obtained from the cemetery. Today all that remains on his property is a one-story Italianate home and carriage house.” San Francisco’s practice of historic preservation would traditionally protect landscaping on properties identified as known historic resources where the landscaping is determined to be a significant feature of the property or significant to the setting of the property. In this case, the property’s designation of “Type A” indicates that property is a known historic resource but the Department and the nominator have been unable to deliver conclusive evidence that the nominated tree was indeed planted as part of the original estate. The property owner’s arborist also suggests that the location of the tree in front of the carriage house raises questions about whether the tree was planted later when the carriage house and driveway approach was no longer used for carriages but instead became housing.

If conclusive evidence had revealed that the nominated tree or other landscaping were original to this historic property and its original owner, a strong case could be made for not only landmarking the buildings but also the relevant trees or landscaping onsite. Current research, while in depth and well done, seems unable to make this case. For further research see nominator’s packet of “Additional Exhibits.”

Profiled in a publication or other media: Yes Unknown

Tree has received coverage in print, internet, video media, etc. **Attach documentation** if appropriate.

Describe coverage:

The property was mentioned in the book *Here Today: San Francisco’s Architectural Heritage* (1978) but no specific publication mentions the particular nominated tree.

Environmental ___ Yes ___ Partially **X** No

Prominent landscape feature: **X** Yes ___ No
A striking and outstanding natural feature.

Describe, attach photo if possible:

The tree is impressive, beautiful and a good example of the species, it is visible from streets and surrounding properties. The recent removal of three other mature trees (two palms and another pine) make this tree more of a prominent feature in the absence of these others

Low tree density: ___ Low **X** Moderate ___ High
Tree exists in a neighborhood with very few trees.

Describe:

According to Urban Forest Plan's neighborhood tree canopy map, the property appears to fall between the Inner Richmond (9.5% tree canopy) and Presidio Heights (11.5% tree canopy). Compared to other neighborhoods in the city, this would be considered "moderate" tree canopy. Aerial maps show street trees and a significant number of trees located in backyards.

Interdependent group of trees: ___ Yes **X** No

This tree in an integral member of a group of trees and removing it may have an adverse impact on adjacent trees.

Describe:

The tree is not part of an interdependent group of trees. Although it was situated with three other mature trees on the property that have been recently removed by the property owner.

Visible or Accessible from public right-of-way: **X** Yes ___ No

High visibility and/or accessibility from public property.

Describe:

The trees is visible (not accessible) from the street and surrounding streets. It's height allows it to stand above the roofline of nearby homes.

High traffic area: ___ Yes **X** No

Tree is located in an area that has a high volume of vehicle, pedestrian or bike traffic and has a potential traffic calming effect.

Describe:

The property is located on a dead end (Cook Street). However, a school located on the block (now closed?) could generate significant traffic.

Important wildlife habitat: ___ Yes **X** No

Species has a known relationship with a particular local wildlife species or it provides food, shelter, or nesting to specific known wildlife individuals.

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Describe:

The tree is a non-native species. However, neighbors describe the tree being popular with birds and have provided some firsthand accounts of the tree being used for perching by a peregrine falcon and mocking bird.

Erosion control: Yes No

Tree prevents soil erosion.

Describe:

No erosion control benefits that I am aware of.

Wind or sound barrier: Yes No

Tree reduces wind speed or mitigates undesirable noise.

Describe:

Neighbors report additional wind and sound from removal of other large trees on the property. I am not aware of a large wind or sound issue in the neighborhood (potentially Geary Blvd).

Cultural Yes Partially No

Neighborhood appreciation: Yes None apparent

Multiple indicators such as letters of support, petition, outdoor gatherings, celebrations adjacent or related to tree, etc. Attach documentation:

Describe:

Large showing of public support for tree by immediate neighbors. Petition submitted by nominator includes 150 signatures many from nearby residents.

Cultural appreciation: Yes None apparent

Particular value to certain cultural or ethnic groups in the city.

Describe nature of appreciation:

Planting contributes to neighborhood character: Yes No

Tree contributes significantly to, or represents, neighborhood aesthetic.

Describe contribution: N/A

Profiled in a publication or other media: Yes Unknown

Tree has received coverage in print, internet, video media, etc. **Attach documentation** if appropriate.

Describe coverage: N/A

Prominent landscape feature: Yes No

A striking and outstanding natural feature.

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Describe, attach photo if possible:

Surrounding neighbors consider this a strong landscape feature.

Additional comments

While the pine is a beautiful and mature tree that provides significant cultural value to neighbors and contributes to neighborhood character, in my assessment the lack of species rarity and proven historical association do not make it a successful candidate for landmarking. Under the Public Works Code, the distinction of a “landmark tree” is uniquely reserved for trees of exceptional quality, rarity or historical significance. I do feel it is extremely unfortunate that the property owner has decided to pursue removal of other large trees on the property including possibly this one. This is a loss both to the neighborhood and the city. The Council is not able to landmark each tree throughout the city that faces a similar fate. However, I feel given the frequency at which we are seeing increasing mature tree removals due to real estate speculation or other motivations, I would like to encourage the Urban Forestry Council to gain a better understanding of the issues that motivate property owners to remove these trees, what options other than landmarking may be available for protecting trees on private property and how the City can support property owners in persevering these trees for our city and the many ecological, cultural and economic benefits they provide.