



## ORACLE OAK, LLC

146 Jordan Ave, San Francisco CA 94118 • (415) 225-5567 • larrycostello@me.com

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Submitted to: Landmark Tree Committee of the SF Urban Forest Council

Submitted by: Larry Costello, Consulting Arborist

Re: Landmark Nomination of *Araucaria sp.* at 46 Cook St., SF

Members of the Landmark Tree Committee,

As a follow-up to my comments at the Landmark Tree Committee hearing (8/6/15) concerning the *Araucaria sp.* being considered for landmark status, I offer these additional comments:

### **1. Tree Identification**

Based on the following statement made by Dr. Matt Ritter, Professor of Biology, Cal Poly State University, San Luis Obispo (8/31/15), it appears that the tree in question is a hybrid:

*I can tell from the images that this is a hybrid between *Araucaria columnaris* and *A. heterophylla*. It sounds from your description as well that it is demonstrating characters between the two. There are many hybrids of those two species in California. One of my graduate students is studying the population genetics and lean of these trees and we're hoping to find the markers necessary to clarify which trees are hybrids in California and which trees are just demonstrating within species variation. I'd call this one a hybrid based on the images though. The bark and leaves of both species are virtually identical and the only reliable character to tell them apart in cultivation is the shape of the canopy and the lean.*

From this assessment, some questions can be considered:

Is it Norfolk Island pine (*Araucaria heterophylla*)? No

Is it Cook pine (*Araucaria columnaris*)? No

Is it a named hybrid? No

Are hybrids between *A. heterophylla* and *A. columnaris* rare? No

Is it a 50-50 mix of *A. heterophylla* and *A. columnaris*? Don't know – it could be a 75-25 mix.

Does it have traits that make it more desirable than either species? Don't know.

Does it have traits that make it less desirable than either species? Don't know.

Clearly, there is a lot we don't know about this tree. Rather than it being unique, it's

more of an enigma. In my view, the Committee should know exactly what the tree is if it's being considered for landmark status. In this case, there are a lot of questions.

## **2. Suitability for the Location**

For *Araucaria* species, the Sunset Western Garden Book states the following:  
*Make impressive skyline trees and are seen in that role in many parks and old estates in California --- but they become so towering that they really do need the space they have in a park or large, open property. And they are not trees to sit under --- with age they bear large, spiny 10-15 lb cones that fall with a crash.*

Clearly, it is well recognized that this tree is not intended for small properties, as at 46 Cook St. It may have been suitable when the property was much larger (in the late 1800s), but not now. I doubt that anyone on the Committee would recommend it for planting at its current site. Simply, it is a very large tree in a relatively small space. If the tree should fail structurally (trunk break, uprooting, or branch break), the consequences are likely to be severe. Even the cones could cause a serious injury. It is a tree that is not suitable for its location.

## **3. Unintended Consequences**

The Landmark Tree Committee should give serious consideration to the potential for "unintended consequences" associated with the assignment of landmark status. This case may very well set an unfortunate precedent: buyers of new properties (especially developers) may act quickly to remove notable trees from a newly acquired property due to concerns about the tree(s) being nominated for landmark status. If this tree is landmarked without agreement from the property owner, then future property owners may feel at risk. As a result, some very nice trees may be removed simply out of fear of a landmarking action. This would be highly unfortunate.

With the above in mind, I strongly recommend that you to decline the nomination of this tree for landmark status.

Sincerely,

L.R. Costello  
Oracle Oak LLC