



CITY of CALABASAS

HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION AGENDA REPORT
MAY 17, 2023

TO: Members of the Historic Preservation Commission

FROM: Tom Bartlett, AICP, City Planner

DATE: MAY 10, 2023

SUBJECT: Discussion of Heritage Oak Tree in Old Town Calabasas

INTRODUCTION:

At the previous Commission meeting, members of the Historic Preservation Commission inquired about the exceptionally large oak tree located in the center portion of a property at 23556 Calabasas Road (APN 2068-004-004). This magnificent old oak tree is a heritage oak tree, according to the Calabasas Municipal Code, and it is an unmistakable landmark in the middle of Old Town Calabasas. The property on which the oak tree sits is owned by the Leonis Adobe Association, and it is developed with two commercial buildings – one on either side of the large tree.

This report provides information about the heritage oak tree, as appropriate to assist Commission members in any discussion about options for possibly recognizing the tree in some fashion.

REVIEW AUTHORITY:

Among the duties ascribed to the Calabasas Historic Preservation Commission, is the Commission's role in historic appropriateness reviews of development project proposals for properties located in Old Town Calabasas. Notwithstanding the fact that Old Town Calabasas is not a designated historic district (which otherwise would require official review by the HPC under State and City laws), development project reviews for Old Town Calabasas properties, and other matters concerning Old Town, are addressed by the Commission in its capacity as the "Old Town Coalition".

REPORT FROM STAFF:

Valley Oaks are native, long-lived, flood- and drought-tolerant, monoecious, deciduous trees commonly found throughout the State of California. They are the largest of North American oak trees. According to a report from the US Dept. of Agriculture (by Janet L. Howard, 1992), Valley Oaks (e.g., *Quercus lobata*) are typically 30 to 75 feet (10-25 m) tall and from 1.8 feet to 2.4 feet in trunk diameter (at standard measuring height of 4.5 feet). However, the report further points out that individual specimens may occasionally be much larger, with the largest recorded Valley Oak tree having a trunk diameter of more than nine feet (in Gridley, CA). And in terms of height, a particular tree in the Carmel Valley was noted by the USDA report as being 138 feet tall. Valley Oaks can live to be 400 to 500 years old, or even greater. Refer to this webpage for the full USDA report:

<https://www.fs.usda.gov/database/feis/plants/tree/quelob/all.html>

An arborist from Dudek (a planning consulting firm on retainer to the City) prepared an oak tree report for this particular tree in 2021 (see Exhibit B). According to the report from Dudek, the trunk of the Valley Oak tree was measured at 66 inches (5 & ½ feet) in diameter, and the overall height of the tree was estimated to be 50 feet. Although spotty deadwood conditions were noted, the oak tree report stated that the tree was in overall good health. From Planning staff's own observations this Spring, the tree remains in good health, even though the spotty deadwood conditions persist.

Measurements taken by Planning staff over the past week indicate the following regarding the tree's size:

- The tree canopy extends outward from the trunk as much as 45 feet (e.g., having an average diameter of approximately 80 to 90 feet);
- The tree canopy covers an area of approximately 6,000 square feet; and,
- The tree's height is currently estimated to be approximately 60 to 65 feet.

Estimating the age of a large Valley Oak tree is very difficult due to a variety of factors. Nonetheless, based on the referenced reports and Staff's observations, the subject oak tree is estimated to be approximately 200 years old. Based on this age estimate, the tree sprouted from an acorn sometime around 1820. This was a time when James Monroe was President, only 23 of our nation's 50 states had formerly been admitted into the Union, and indigenous tribal populations still inhabited much of the western territories. Locally, the Chumash were the only permanent local inhabitants, and the Juan Bautista de Anza expedition had passed through the area only a few decades earlier (in 1776). Also at about the time this magnificent tree first sprouted, work concluded on the chain of Spanish missions along the California coast. The nearby Leonis Adobe was originally constructed in 1844, 20 years or so after the tree was well established. And the historic Masson House

was constructed when the tree was still a very young 80 years of age.

FUTURE ACTIONS:

This report serves primarily to inform the members of the Commission about the tree and to provide relevant context. In its capacity as the 'Old Town Coalition', the Commission may want to explore ideas for recognizing the tree – such as might be accomplished with an informational plaque near the tree's base. Discussion among the Commission members and idea generation would be appropriate; as necessary, Planning Staff can assist by providing additional information. Ideas generated by the Commission for ways to recognize the old oak tree will be forwarded to the Department Director.

ATTACHMENTS:

- Exhibit A: Photographs of the Heritage Oak Tree
- Exhibit B: Oak Tree Report dated September 2, 2021