

Client: City of Sebastopol Planning Department
Project Location: 7580 Washington Ave, Sebastopol, CA
Inspection Date: July 2, 2025
Arborist: Ben Anderson



Assignment

Tori Henkel asked me to review a tree removal permit application for a coast live oak tree (*Quercus agrifolia*) to help determine whether its removal would be consistent with the municipal code. The removal request was precipitated by concerns expressed by plans to develop the subject property. No one met me onsite, but I had full access to the tree.

Observations

The subject property is in an area zoned for single-family residential. It is currently undeveloped. I was provided with the preliminary plan set and an arborist report from Kevin Paul of Sandborn Tree Service, dated February 25, 2025. Only one tree on the site has a trunk diameter (dbh) greater than 20 inches, though two others are very close at 19.0 inches and 17.5 inches. There are several other young coast live oaks on the site and a large plum tree (*Prunus sp.*, 15.5" dbh). Presumably, all trees will be removed from the site.

The arborist report accurately describes the three largest trees, although there was a discrepancy in the diameters. I reached out to Mr. Paul to clarify and he sent me photos showing their trunk measurements to clarify.

I could not find the trees shown on any of the provided plans. It appears it may be possible to retain the top-most tree, which is very close to the diameter cutoff for permit protection.

Discussion

From the Sebastopol Municipal Code 8.12.060: "Tree removal permit—When a Tree Removal Permit is Required."

Single-Family and Duplex Residential. On properties which house a single-family or duplex residential use, no person shall allow or cause the removal of a tree that has a minimum diameter at breast height (d.b.h.) of 20 inches or more if the tree has a single trunk, or which has at least one trunk with a minimum d.b.h. of 20 inches if the tree has two or more trunks without first obtaining a TRP, unless otherwise exempted herein.

The tree is greater than 20 inches and requires a permit.

From the Sebastopol Municipal Code 8.12.060 D "Tree removal permit – Tree Removal Criteria," at least one of the following conditions must be satisfied to approve a tree removal permit:

1. The tree is diseased or structurally unsound and, as a result, is likely to become a significant hazard to life or property within the next two years.

The tree did not appear diseased or structurally unsound and was not described as such in the arborist report. Trunk leans are technically a structural defect, but are naturally occurring and very common on coast live oaks.

2. The tree poses a likely foreseeable threat to life or property which cannot be reasonably mitigated through pruning, root barriers, or other management methods.

N/A.

3. The property owner can demonstrate that there are unreasonably onerous recurring maintenance issues, which are deemed necessary for safety or protection of property. The property owner is responsible for providing documentation to support such a claim.

N/A

4. A situation exists or is proposed in which structures or improvements, including, but not limited to, building additions, second units, swimming pools, and solar energy systems, such as solar panels, cannot be reasonably designed or altered to avoid the need for tree removal.

I am unfamiliar with the specific setback and building spacing requirements for the property, but from an arborist's perspective, it appears the buildings could be rearranged to accommodate the tree, especially if all other trees on the site are removed.

5. The tree has matured to such an extent that it is determined to be out of scale with adjacent structures and utilities, or with other landscape features.

There are many other trees of similar stature on this and adjacent properties.

Conclusions

The subject tree, which is over 20 inches in diameter, cannot be removed without a permit. Its removal fails to meet any of the removal criteria listed in the municipal code related to tree condition. Without the tree locations shown on a plan, it is difficult to determine whether they need to be removed or how much redesign would be necessary to accommodate the trees. If the tree were retained, it would screen the home from the street, but also potentially block desirable views from the new home to the north, although the project description describes expansive views to the east.

Other than the largest, leaning tree, the other trees may be removed without a permit, though it would be nice to keep the larger oaks if possible. The tree at the top of the site looks to be a candidate for preservation. This could be confirmed if the trees were accurately located and shown on the plans.

The landscape plan lists the replacement trees as "live oak" and "Japanese maple." Japanese maple is not on the approved list in the ordinance. I recommend planting vine maple (*Acer circinatum*) in its place. It is a California native that serves a similar purpose in the landscape to Japanese maples.

SCOPE OF WORK AND LIMITATIONS

Urban Forestry Associates has no personal or monetary interest in the outcome of this investigation. All observations regarding trees in this report were made by UFA independently, based on our education and experience. All determinations of the health condition, structural condition, or hazard potential of a tree or trees at issue are based on our best professional judgment. The health and hazard assessments in this report are limited by the visual nature of the assessment. Arborists cannot detect every condition that could lead to a tree's structural failure. Since trees are living organisms, conditions are often hidden within the tree and below ground. Arborists cannot guarantee that a tree will be healthy or safe under all circumstances or for a specific period of time. Likewise, remedial treatments cannot be guaranteed. Trees can be managed, but they cannot be controlled. To live near trees is to accept some degree of risk, and the only way to eliminate all risks associated with trees is to eliminate all trees.



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