

# Return of the Heritage Trees?



On June 26, former SLO City Councilmember John Ashbaugh and Santa Lucia Chapter Outings Leader Joe Morris addressed the City of San Luis Obispo's Tree Committee on the state of the city's Heritage Trees program and suggested improvements for this important public project.

The transcript of Dr. Morris's remarks follows.

*Hello, I'm Dr. Joe Morris, a local resident of San Luis Obispo for the last eleven years. I've served also as outings leader and outings chair of the local Sierra Club. My remarks to you today have the input and support of our chapter, which has over 2,300 members locally.*

*On the dozens of local hikes I've led, a special love of mine has been the native trees of this area like the coastal live oaks and also the street trees of San Luis Obispo, like the redwoods and southern magnolias.*

*Thus, I was initially excited to learn the existence of the city's Heritage Trees program so that I might incorporate its specimens into my walks. I've found that local residents universally love our trees and learning about them. And, of course, they are crucial to making our city more livable, more beautiful, and cooler.*

*But when I then tried to learn about the Heritage Trees program, I ran into serious problems.*

*First, the city website pretty much hides the program and gives limited and incorrect information. Of the 15 Heritage Trees listed, for instance, several don't give addresses, and several more are dead!*

*Secondly, it has been very difficult to reach anyone to tell me about the program. I've phoned a person mentioned on the website who referred me to another person, who never returned my phone call, and then the same for another.*

*Thirdly, the list of 15 trees, not added to since 1990 except for one tree, needs revision to remove dead trees and add new ones. There are obvious candidates, like the historic pepper and Canary Island Palms that were brought here by the Mission Padres.*

*Fourthly, it needs publicity. There is zero amount now. This wonderful pamphlet on the Heritage Trees is long out of print. It needs updating and expansion.*

*In conclusion, I assume all of you know that San Luis Obispo has a very small percentage of tree cover -- only about 13%, compared to the national average of 27%. We need more trees, and better attention to the ones we have.*

Joseph Morris, Ph.D.