



## Staff Report

### March 12, 2024

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**TO:** Honorable Mayor and Members of the Town Council  
**FROM:** Merrill Buck, Town Engineer  
**RE:** Initiation of the Adopt an Oak Tree / Oak Tree Pruning Grant Program

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#### **Recommendation**

Staff recommends that the Town Council receive a presentation on proposed Adopt an Oak Tree, and Oak Tree Pruning Grant programs. Following the presentation, staff recommends that the Town Council provide feedback and adopt a resolution authorizing staff to launch the program.

#### **Issue Statement and Discussion**

The Town's Tree Conservation Ordinance, adopted in 2014, states as its purpose, the intent to promote a healthy tree canopy. The primary benefit cited for doing this is public safety. As healthy trees are safe trees. The ordinance also describes trees as being a community asset that need protection, maintenance and continued rejuvenation. Finally, it acknowledges the delicate balance between the rights of private citizens to develop their properties and the public interest in preserving a community tree canopy.

The Tree Conservation Ordinance identifies four native oak species as contributing heavily to the special character of the Town. These include:

1. Blue Oak (*Quercus douglasii*)
2. Valley Oak (*Quercus lobata*)
3. Interior Live Oak (*Quercus wislizenii*)
4. Oracle Oak (*Quercus x morehus*)

The above four trees are actively protected by the ordinance and require a permit to remove along with either replacement planting, or the payment of in-lieu fees to minimize the impact to the native oak tree canopy. This requirement primarily applies to commercial property, however, as the ordinance exempts the removal of protected oak trees from residential parcels that are zoned with a lot size of 4.6 acres or less, and can no longer be subdivided.

Since its inception in 2014, the tree ordinance has collected over \$500,000 in mitigation fees. As an allowable expenditure, just over \$200,000 of this amount was spent in 2022 to oversee the pruning of trees along some of the Town's more significant arterial and collector streets. At the time this expenditure was approved, there was feedback from several members of the community stating that they would prefer to see the Tree Fund money spent on programs that more specifically target the protection, maintenance and planting of oak trees.

In 2019, Helix Environmental Planning completed a Tree Mitigation Planting Area Assessment Report to determine the suitability of the Town's publicly owned parcels and right of way for oak tree mitigation planting. A map from this report is provided as Attachment B. The map and report conclude that there are relatively little to no opportunities for planting oak trees in public areas.

As a community asset, the planting of oak trees “anywhere” in Town would realize the tree ordinance’s goal of preserving and replanting the Town’s tree canopy with oak trees. Not to mention that the greatest opportunity for planting new trees is on private property, and that the ordinance encourages the replanting of oak trees on private property at the time a tree is proposed for removal, and only collects an in-lieu fee as mitigation when this can’t be done. Planting new trees on private property should also result in a higher level of survivability since the property owner willing to plant the tree would have a vested interest in watering the tree, as necessary, until it becomes established.

### **Adopt an Oak Tree Program**

Building upon this idea of encouraging oak trees to be planted anywhere in town, regardless of the public or private land designation, staff proposes to create an “Adopt an Oak Tree Program” which would encourage residents to adopt and plant the protected species of oak, listed in the Tree Conservation Ordinance, on their property. As part of this program, the Town would provide juvenile oak trees to residents free of charge, thereby rejuvenating the Town’s urban forest by allowing oak trees to grow and flourish where they’re wanted.

Staff recommends that trees be provided in a 5-gallon size, This is still a fairly substantial tree, but is easier to move than the next bigger size, which is a 15-gallon tree. The 5-gallon tree also has a much smaller price point being roughly \$30-\$50 compared to \$100-\$120 for a 15-gallon tree. Finally, the 5-gallon size tends to have a higher survivability rate when planted, due to not being root-bound in the container.

The proposed program will follow a simple 4-step process for any interested Loomis resident:

- 1) Review the Adopt an Oak Tree program information and understand the terms and conditions (Loomis residents only, tree to be planted in Loomis, not for resell, property owner is responsible for pickup, planting, watering, and future maintenance).
- 2) Download and complete an application.
- 3) Submit the application to the Town.
- 4) Receive confirmation when the requested tree is available for pickup at the Corp Yard.

As part of the program information, the Town will provide a tree selection guide which would include a description and visual representation of each tree type offered, information on the most suitable location to plant the tree, including recommended spacing from existing structures, and a tree planting guide with detailed step by step soil prep and planting procedures to assist applicants in successfully planting their tree. These guides will be available at the same website link as the application.

### **Oak Tree Pruning Grant Program**

The Oak Tree Pruning Grant Program targets the desire in the Tree Conservation Ordinance to sustain a healthy tree canopy, as a community benefit, by sharing in the cost of tree maintenance. This also honors the public/private partnership of caring for a tree canopy that benefits the entire community. Finally, the sharing in the cost of maintenance is structured in a way that encourages pruning by professionals.

The program is envisioned as a 50/50 matching grant up to \$1,500 per property, per year, to be provided as a rebate upon completion of the work. More specifically, the steps and process for the program are as follows:

- 1) Review the Oak Tree Pruning Grant Program information and understand the terms and conditions (Loomis residents only, tree located in Loomis, work to be completed by an ISA certified tree care professional, only for tree pruning not removal, only one grant award per fiscal year, multiple trees ok, but the Town’s contribution shall not exceed \$1,500).
- 2) Quote with application to be reviewed and approved by the Town before the work starts to ensure the proposed work qualifies and that funding is available.

- 3) Submit payment request, before and after photos, and a copy of the contractor's invoice when work is completed.
- 4) The Town will review the submission and provide a rebate check within 30 days.

### **Conclusion**

The Adopt an Oak Tree and Oak Tree Pruning Grant programs provide a framework for the Town to spend down the Tree Mitigation Fund that better targets oak trees. As opposed to past expenditures that were used for pruning of all trees in the public right of way. Through these programs, the Town can take a decisive step to proactively expand and professionally maintain its native oak tree canopy, while including Loomis residents in the process. Both programs are an opportunity to promote a healthy tree canopy needed for community enjoyment, and a vibrant, functioning ecosystems, while increasing public safety, wellbeing, and preserving the Town's rural character.

### **Financial and/or Policy Implications**

In July 2022, the Town's Tree Fund (145) had a balance of roughly \$400,000. As expenditures against this amount, two contracts, each in the amount of \$100,000, were authorized by the Town Council in 2022 to prune trees in the Town's right of way. As revenue, Costco contributed \$115,000 to the Tree Fund as mitigation for oak tree loss. This leaves the current balance of the Tree Fund at approximately \$300,000.

The Adopt an Oak Tree program was funded in the FY 2022-23 Capital Improvements Program (CIP) with a budget of \$30,000. The Oak Tree Pruning Grant Program was not envisioned as part of this project, and is being recommended as an additional program expenditure within this project. Pruning will be much more expensive than planting, although planting will have the greater long-term benefit in creating the desired oak trees canopy. It is therefore recommended that \$5,000 be reserved for the Adopt an Oak Tree portion of the program, and \$25,000 for Oak Tree Pruning. Expenditures against these target amounts will be authorized and awarded on a first-come, first-serve basis. If the program is successful beyond the current budget, staff will return to Council for an additional budget appropriation.

### **Attachments**

- A. Resolution
- B. Tree Mitigation Opportunity Assessment Map

# TOWN OF LOOMIS

## RESOLUTION NO. 24 - \_\_\_\_\_

### A RESOLUTION OF THE TOWN COUNCIL OF THE TOWN OF LOOMIS AUTHORIZING STAFF TO INITIATE THE ADOPT AN OAK TREE AND OAK TREE PRUNING GRANT PROGRAMS

**WHEREAS**, the Town's Tree Conservation Ordinance collects in-lieu fees to minimize the impact that the removal of certain protected species of oak tree has on the Town's tree canopy; and

**WHEREAS**, the Town's tree canopy is a community asset, that needs protection, maintenance and continued rejuvenation; and

**WHEREAS**, most of the Town's tree canopy is on private property, so the opportunity to maintain this canopy in a healthy condition, and add to it with new plantings, is dependent upon the cooperation of private property owners; and

**WHEREAS**, the Town wishes to create both an Adopt a Tree Program and an Oak Tree Pruning Grant Program to rejuvenate the Town's tree canopy with new oak tree plantings and to help maintain the tree canopy in a healthy condition; and

**WHEREAS**, staff has presented ideas for these programs, which the Council concurs with, to be funded from the Adopt a Tree Program budgeted in the FY 2022-23 Capital Improvements Program.

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** that the Town Council of the Town of Loomis does hereby authorize staff to initiate the Adopt an Oak Tree and Oak Tree Pruning Grant programs.

**PASSED AND ADOPTED** this 12<sup>th</sup> day of March 2024 by the following vote:

**AYES:**

**NOES:**

**ABSENT:**

**ABSTAINED:**

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Mayor

ATTEST:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Deputy Town Clerk

