

To: Honorable City Council, Planning Commission and Historical Commission

From: Andrew Mariani

Subject: Los Altos Heritage Orchard

As a local commercial orchardist for many years, I have been asked by several Los Altos citizens to comment on the problems facing the Los Altos Heritage Orchard. In the past, I have also consulted with some of the principals involved in the management of both the Saratoga and Sunnyvale Heritage Orchards. These orchards represent 3 distinct models, each having its own set of factors that impact the maintenance and preservation of their respective sites. However, there are also palpable challenges common to all three, most formidably their locations in urban, largely public settings, that make it increasingly difficult to accomplish the goal of orchard preservation.

While I am involved in fruit growing research and have written and lectured on various horticultural topics, my deep involvement in trying to preserve my own orchard in the face of urban pressures has helped me to identify various issues involved in preserving local orchards. There are several other orchardists, who have had similar experiences, including Charlie Olson, Mike McKinney, and Phil Cosentino. If City officials, stakeholders and other concerned parties are willing, some of us local growers are ready to visit the Los Altos orchard sometime in the near future and share our experience and expertise.

Major challenges include the general attrition of an aging orchard with a major focus on management practices to control putative diseases like Bacterial Canker, Oak Root Fungus and Monilinia Blossom and Fruit Rot. The goal is to improve the health and productivity of existing trees, replant where necessary for orchard renewal, and accomplish it in a sustainable, environmentally responsible way that also preserves the integrity of the orchard site. There are many new practices that have been developed for modern orchards, but to the extent practicable, the goal will be to not only preserve the trees but also the historical context in which the trees once thrived.

The approach involves a commitment to some traditional growing practices that have endured the test of time, like pruning, thinning and irrigation but will also utilize newer, scientifically based practices that further the continued health of the orchard. It is a difficult but not insurmountable goal. If this offer is of interest to those involved in the restoration and continued preservation of the Heritage Orchard in Los Altos, please respond. You may email me directly with any questions regarding this message.

Respectfully submitted,

Andrew Mariani, local orchardist