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20 some trees felled on property next to Environmental Nature Center in Newport Beach



Workers remove trees on a property beside the Environmental Nature Center on E. 16th Street in Newport Beach, CA on Monday, Dec. 30, 2024. (Photo by Paul Bersebach, Orange County Register/SCNG)



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Staff at the [Environmental Nature Center in Newport Beach](#) were holding out hope a 50-foot live oak, the last of a forest of trees they've cared for over decades, would remain standing.

But on Wednesday, Jan. 8, it too was felled. More than 20 trees, varieties of toyons, Catalina cherry trees, redwood and oaks, that once helped create a

forest-like setting for the nature center were removed over the last two weeks by a crew hired by a neighboring owner establishing the property boundary line for sale.



Workers remove trees on a property beside the Environmental Nature Center on E. 16th Street in Newport Beach, CA on Monday, Dec. 30, 2024. The green tape is the property line with the nature center on the left. (Photo by Paul Bersebach, Orange County Register/SCNG)

“We are deeply saddened by the loss of one of our original oak trees planted nearly 50 years ago by Newport Harbor High volunteers alongside our founder Robert House,” said Bo Glover, president of the nature center, which has been operating since 1972.

“This tree was more than just part of our landscape. It was a living testament to decades of stewardship and collaboration, offering priceless habitat and irreplaceable beauty,” he added. “Its loss cannot simply be remedied by planting a new tree. A mature oak’s ecological and aesthetic value takes generations to cultivate.”

The center is now 25 years into a 50-year lease of property with the Newport Mesa Unified School District – a fence separated the land from the neighboring property, which was once home to the Newport Bay Hospital. The hospital has

been closed for the last two years, and some of the former buildings have been demolished.

Owners of the former hospital property have been considering the redevelopment and sale of the location and had a survey of the property's boundaries done, according to a letter shared by their attorney, William Brinkloe Jr. at Transaction Law. The survey showed the fence on the leased NMUSD property was in an incorrect place, the letter initially directed to the nature center said.

The letter said representatives of the owners had met with district officials about the property line inconsistency and the district also performed its independent survey, confirming the boundary line.

The launch of the tree removal effort on Dec. 23 surprised and shocked the nature center's staff, Glover said. Education stations had been set up on trails near the fenceline, where crews suddenly appeared with chainsaws. Center staff scrambled to usher the children from trails in that area.

"It was done without any warning for us on the first day of winter camp," Glover said.

"The fence has been in place for 50 years-plus and planted and maintained by our education programs over that time," Glover said, adding that it was a shame the center staff wasn't "put around a table to discuss this" before the trees were removed.

Annette Franco, a spokesperson for the NMUSD, confirmed this week that the tree removal was not taking place on school district property.

"In addition to removing trees on their property, the property owner also is installing fencing based on two accurate property surveys, separating their property from the NMUSD property," she said.

When the cutting began, Newport Beach City Councilmember Erik Weigand was contacted by Glover and asked the city's code enforcement to ensure the tree removal crew was breaking no rules and not violating the nature center's property lines.

"It's a place to escape into nature," Weigand said, recalling his experiences growing up in Newport Beach. "It was kind of a forest setting; now you let in light."

He also mentioned the former hospital property has been identified in the [city's housing element](#) as a spot where commercial property owners can put through plans to build residential housing.

"It is anticipated that an experienced and well-qualified developer will purchase the property for a multi-family residential development," Brinkloe said. "As noted in my letter to the Environmental Nature Center, it will have the opportunity to provide its input and comments once the new owner and developer submits its development plans to the city of Newport Beach.

"The entire process has been a difficult learning experience for the family," he added. "Furthermore, it was a hard decision to sell the property because it has been in the family for over 70 years. The family decided it would be in the best interest of both them and the community to sell the property to allow for the construction of critically needed housing in Newport Beach."

Glover said on Wednesday that he and others at the center are heartbroken over the loss of the forest setting.

"The natural screen we worked decades to establish along our perimeter, providing students and visitors with a peaceful escape into nature, has been severely diminished," he said. "Now the built environment is glaringly apparent, a stark contrast to the serene, natural haven we have worked tirelessly to maintain."