

The Heritage Oak Dilemma

Ms. Keesha Thomas owns a lot in the fashionable shopping district of downtown Center City. The lot is currently vacant. Ms. Thomas would like to build a luxury car business on the lot and is asking the city for permission to do so. She feels that the lot is perfectly situated to attract customers and to show off her cars. She has been waiting a long time to develop this business; now that she finally has the money, she wants the car dealership to look just right.

Ms. Thomas plans to build a small sales office on the lot and to pave the entire area for parking. Currently a huge oak tree is in the middle of the lot. The tree is about 150 years old and is known around town as the Heritage Oak. Ms. Thomas wants to remove the tree because she needs the space to park cars. She also feels that the tree would damage her cars with falling leaves, twigs, acorns, bird droppings, and large branches.

The city's plan does not prohibit developing a car dealership in that district, but it does state that all lots must have at least one shade tree for every 20 feet of sidewalk frontage. The regulation exists so shade from trees can reduce glare for drivers and shoppers and can make the area more beautiful.

Ms. Thomas does not want that many trees along the sidewalk because she thinks they would hide her cars. Her lot is about 120 feet (36.6 m) long, which will require six trees. Also, she says those street trees could create a mess that would blow onto her expensive cars and cause damage.

The neighbors who live behind the lot are against development of the car business. They are worried about the ugly sight and loud noises from a car lot. Now they enjoy a view of the Heritage Oak from their windows.

The local environmental group is also against the car business. The group is concerned about the Heritage

Oak, which it says is a proud, healthy tree that is a piece of living history. The group wants the city council to protect the Heritage Oak as well as the land immediately around it, because paving around the oak will harm its roots. In addition, the group is working to get the city council to enforce the city's plan of providing street trees, and it wants to be sure that all new and existing lots have street trees.

