

## Qualifications for Designation as a Sea Cliff Heritage Tree

As noted in Article VIII of Section 121 (Tree Preservation and Protection Ordinance) of the Sea Cliff Village Code, individual trees may be considered important community resources because of unique or noteworthy characteristics or values. These trees are defined as Heritage Trees, which are special status trees with certain characteristics that are singled out for special consideration. These trees are included in a Heritage Tree List maintained by the Village, and have special provisions in the Village code.

**Nomination** – As defined in the Village Code, a tree only can be defined as a Heritage Tree if nominated by the owner of the private property on which the tree exists, and if subsequently approved for inclusion by the Tree Commission and Board of Trustees. Any tree on public property can be nominated by any resident of Sea Cliff, and after approval by the Board of Trustees, may also be included in the list.

One or more of the following criteria may be used to define a Heritage Tree:

**Size** - Tree size, most frequently trunk diameter, may be used to define a Heritage Tree. A given diameter at 4.5 ft above grade (i.e., Diameter at Breast Height or DBH) is used as the size standard. Other components of tree size, such as maximum canopy spread or height, may also be considered independently or in conjunction with tree diameter. Each tree species can have their own sizes at which they are considered exceptional. Trees that are New York State or National “Champion” trees as defined in The National Register of Big Trees, maintained by American Forests, are automatically eligible for Heritage Tree status.

**Species** – Heritage Tree status may be conferred to certain species of trees. These trees are often, but not always, important locally-native species or trees that are associated with the character of a community. Certain species that are relatively rare in an area, whether native or not, may also be granted Heritage status.

**Age** - Especially old trees are a link to the past, so Heritage Trees include age as a criterion. In practice, tree age is fairly difficult to determine in standing trees unless documentation of tree age exists from historical accounts, photographs, or associations with historical structures. Tree age is usually inferred from tree size, especially DBH. However, the relationship between age and DBH varies with species, site quality, management history, and other factors, so DBH is usually only a crude estimator of tree age.

**Historic significance** - A Heritage Tree may be associated with a notable local or regional historical event, person, structure, or landscape. Almost every tree that has been around for a while has some historical significance, whether it is recognized or not. Determining whether the historical significance of a given tree is sufficiently notable is therefore a subjective matter. A tree may be designated as a Heritage Tree for any tree designated as historical landmarks by certain organizations (e.g., historical societies). In addition, Heritage Tree status may be assigned to trees dedicated or planted as public memorials.

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**Ecological value** - All trees serve a variety of ecological functions. Certain trees or groups of trees may have especially high ecological value because of their location, size, species, and/or condition. For example, a given tree may be an important roost, nesting site, or food source for certain wildlife species; it may be situated in a site where it plays a critical role in stabilizing soil, holding water, or providing shade needed by other plant or animal species; it may be an important genetic resource for a local tree population or the species as a whole.

**Aesthetics** - Since beauty is in the eye of the beholder, assigning special status on the basis of aesthetics is always highly subjective. A tree may have special aesthetic value due to its form, whether it is especially perfect and symmetrical or notably craggy and idiosyncratic. Also, the function that a tree serves in a landscape may be sufficient to justify special status; for example, a landmark pair of trees that frame an entrance. In the absence of other noteworthy characteristics, it may be contentious to base special status upon aesthetics alone.

**Location** - Trees in particular locations may be accorded Heritage Tree status in recognition of the important aesthetic or ecological functions that they serve. Trees located along or within a set distance from watercourses may also be given this status due to their importance in stabilizing slopes or providing shaded habitat. In some cases, the location of a tree is considered in conjunction with size or species parameters.

**Required plantings and retained trees** - If trees have been preserved or planted as a requirement of development, the community has a vested interest to ensure that the trees are protected. The purpose of planting and tree retention is to develop mature tree canopy, and this cannot occur if the subject trees are eliminated, ruined by topping or other poor maintenance practices, or replaced frequently with young trees. This criterion is typically invoked through the approval of a governing body (e.g., Planning Board or Board of Trustees).

**Other unique characteristics** - This term may be added to the list of criteria used to designate special status trees because it is difficult to anticipate all possible situations of significance. For example, a given tree may become a local or regional cultural icon due to an event that is associated with it.

Because each criterion above has clear limitations and difficulties, most nominations for Heritage Tree status include a combination of criteria.