



Boyle Heights

Neighborhood Council

Council File: Not Applicable

January 27, 2021

RE: 520 India Street, Los Angeles CA 90063 / Bunya Pine Tree /
"Araucaria bidwillii" / "El Pino"

To: Hilda Solis, Supervisor First District, Los Angeles County.
The Los Angeles County Historical and Records Commission
Kevin Deleon, Councilmember, Council District 14, City of Los Angeles

The tall Bunya Pine tree (*Araucaria bidwillii*) aka "El Pino" stands at the the border of Boyle Heights and East Los Angeles. It towers above the house at next door at 3308 Folsom Street that was built in 1915. Bunya Pines first appeared in the West in the mid 1800's, when English botanist John Bidwill sent specimens to English botanist Sir William Hooker. Parts of Southern California and Australia share a similar climate and Australian tree's such as Eucalyptus, Carrotwood, and others remain common fixtures of the landscape of Southern California. Bunyas were popular in the 1880s but were already falling from fashion by the following decade. Several continue to stand in parks but few share space with homes.

The parcel where the tree sits upon was owned by was planted by a Japanese dentist known as Mr. T. Okuno who acquired the property sometime in the 1940's. Before Okuno and the forced internment of Japanese during World War II, the 1940 US census shows that the home belonged to Mr. Orada Hidao and his wife, Kiku — both of whom were born in Japan around the turn of the century. They too, were forced into the camps.

When the Japanese-Americans were freed, most were dispossessed of all they had owned.

However, the Okuno's, after they returned from the camps, were given the home by their Caucasian employer. This family became the stewards of the home, tree, and land for decades - even installing a Koi Pond and other plant and tree varieties that were found in their native Japan, and they lived here into the mid-1980's.

The tree launched into popularity when it was featured as a prominent landmark in the film "Blood In, Blood Out." As an imposing monolith on the local landscape, it seemed fitting to include in the film - just as the Art-Deco Sears Building is an icon of Boyle Heights.

Since then, the tree has kept it's 100 year old watchful eye over this neighborhoods of East Los Angeles and Boyle Height's.

However, on December 29, 2020, the tree was thrust to the forefront of hundreds - if not thousands - of concerned citizens in East Los Angeles, Boyle Height's, and across the nation as they heard that the tree was to be cut down.

A rumor had emerged online that the tree was going to be cut down. Upon investigation, it was discovered that the property is now owned by Art Gastelum of Gateway Science and Engineering (GSE) - a construction and development firm. Mr. Gastelum has filed plans to build a residential duplex around the tree.

Arrocding to the Los Angeles Times, and other online media sources, in December 2019, Mr. Gastelum was probed by the Federal Bureau of Investigation. A federal grand jury issued at least one subpoena seeking records from Art Gastelum in connection to embattled Los Angeles City Councilmember Jose Huizar's development projects. (A subpoena is a means to gather information and does not imply wrongdoing.)

The community of Boyle Heigts has been extensively harmed by former Councilmember Jose Huizar and those that around him that have been guilty of illicit and unethical dealings.

As this tree is only yards away from the Boyle Heights border that separates it from East Los Angeles, we implore that:

- 1) The construction plans for the duplex are reevaluated.
- 2) An independent study is done on a licensed arborists to insure any construction on the site will to have any immediate of future negative effects on the tree.
- 3) The study by the arborist is made public in its entirety.
- 4) The tree shall be registered on The California Superlative Tree List (AKA The Big Tree List) headed by Cal-Poly San Luis Obispo.
- 5) Mr. Art Gastelum will initiate a Los Angeles County Landmark Registration for the tree and that Los Angeles County Supervisor, Hilda Solis, Supervisor First District, and the Los Angeles Historical Landmarks and Records Commission to support this designation.

This tree has stood as a sentinel over the communities of East Los Angeles for over a century. We want to ensure that it continues to stand well into the future.

Respectfully submitted,

The Boyle Heights Neighbored Council