

Key West Literary Seminar



November 4, 2021

Key West Tree Commission

re: 624 White Street, Request for Mahogany removal

Dear Commissioners:

Thank you for considering our request to remove a mahogany tree from the north side-yard at 624 White Street. As the Urban Forestry Manager has indicated in her report, the tree is in fair to poor condition and largely hidden from public view, with a storm-damaged main leader supporting a canopy that leans heavily over the historic structure. The report also notes that the canopy impacts a trio of very tall and rare thatch palms, and the mahogany's base and roots are very close to the historic structure, negatively impacting the concrete cistern and foundation. A supporting letter from historic preservation architect David J. Salay, of Bender & Associates, states that "the roots from this tree have extended into and damaged the foundations of the 19th century concrete cistern porch ... and will continue to damage the house if left."

I would like to provide you with a little more information on who we are, the significance of the site, and our long-term plans for it. Key West Literary Seminar is a charitable and nonprofit corporation under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. We have been in operation in Key West since 1983. Our mission is to promote the understanding of important literary works and their authors; and to preserve Key West's literary heritage. We acquired 624 White Street in 2019. It is the former home of celebrated American poet Elizabeth Bishop, and we are working to restore and preserve the house to the way it was when Bishop lived there in the 1930s and 1940s. We also plan to restore the surrounding landscape to the way it was during that period, using historic photographs of the site and Bishop's own paintings and written descriptions. This historic garden will eventually be open to the public as an educational site dedicated to Bishop and the Key West way of life during the late Depression and the early years of World War II. The Planning Board

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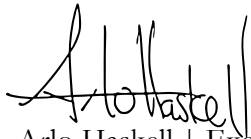
David A. Kaufelt
(1939–2014)

has authorized our intended civic and cultural use of this unique property through resolutions No. 2020-014 and 2020-015.

We are seeking to remove a mahogany tree at this time as we plan to begin the first phase of restoration work on the house in early 2022. This work will include repairs to the foundation and the cistern which have been damaged by the roots of the mahogany tree, and which would be damaged again if the tree remains. Construction drawings for this work have received HARC staff approval; we are currently negotiating an agreement with a contractor and will soon be applying for building permits. In addition to the proposed mahogany removal, we have also been issued a permit for maintenance pruning of three large trees on site; this maintenance will help protect these trees from any adverse impacts during construction (Permit #TREE2021-0345).

I look forward to sharing our full proposal for the historic garden restoration at the Elizabeth Bishop with the Tree Commission at a later date. In the meantime, I hope you will favorably consider our request for removal of a mahogany tree and allow us to get started on the important work of restoring and preserving this historically significant site.

Thank you for your service to our community and our canopy!



Arlo Haskell | Executive Director

Key West Literary Seminar's mission is to promote the understanding of important literary works and their authors, support new American voices, and preserve Key West's literary heritage while providing resources for readers and writers around the world.

Our flagship program is the annual Seminar, which explores a unique literary theme each January. Our Writers' Workshop Program, also in January, provides writers at all stages of development with opportunities to explore their craft in a focused environment. As part of our commitment to a vibrant literary culture, we present three Emerging Writer Awards each year and provide dozens of scholarships to teachers, librarians, and students. Our Young Writers Studio provides local high school students with place-based writing instruction each summer, while the Audio Archives Project makes unique resources available to readers worldwide.

In 2019 we acquired the former Key West home of celebrated poet Elizabeth Bishop. In the coming years, we will restore this national treasure and make it our headquarters.

An island of less than five square miles, Key West has one of the most intriguing literary heritages of any place in America. We are proud to carry on the life of letters in this island city.