2007 Gold Leaf Award Nomination

Project:
Southpark Meadows
Chris Ellis, Endeavor Real Estate Group

General Contractor:
White Construction Company

Contributing Staff:
Jim Rhoades, Arborist, The City of Austin
Chris Dolan, Environmental Review Department, The City of Austin
Aan Coleman, Landscape Architect, Coleman and Associates
Jon Hillis, Tree Relocation Contractor, Environmental Design Incorporated
Patrick Brewer, Arborist, The F. A. Bartlett Tree Expert Company

Background:

Southpark Meadows is a new retail development in South Austin built on a site which had for years been a famous outdoor concert venue. Among many other famous shows over the years, Southpark meadows was the site of several of Willie Nelson's 4th of July Picnics. The venue was famous for its hillside seating area beneath a large number of mature live oaks.

This 165 acre property was submitted for commercial development in February 2005 to the City of Austin Development Review Department. Among other issues, many of the trees at the former seating area were of large enough to trigger the City's tree protection ordinance and the concern of city staff. The proposed development requested two environmental variances from the city – one for construction on slopes, the other for cut/fill in excess of 4 feet. Among the many contributing city staffers, City of Austin arborist Jim Rhoades and Environmental Review specialist Chris Dolan, working with Endeavor Real Estate principal Chris Ellis and with Landscape Architect Aan Coleman, worked to preserve the environmental and cultural contribution of Southpark Meadows to the Austin Community.

Development Process:

After numerous revisions and meetings on the property, a plan was worked out for the site which in return for the variances Endeavor Real Estate agreed to preserve 47 of the 52 mature trees on the site, including many of the historic hillside trees. This involved unusual designs near tenants and restaurants and in some cases several redesigns of the grading/drainage plans to minimize root zone disturbance of the mature trees. Due to the extreme grades at the site, five large live oaks were located in areas that prevented them from being preserved. These five huge trees were slated for relocation at the expense of the developer to areas that would allow for their preservation and contribution to the site. Through the course of the development the city also required the developer to provide a certified arborist to oversee tree protection/preservation for the life of the project, and to provide long term management for the preserved and relocated trees.

Project Construction

Tree Relocation

Relocation services for the large trees were provided by Jon Hillis of Environmental Design, Inc,. The relocation method included using the round ball technique, developed by Environmental Design, to move these massive weights. The trees were pre-stressed by root cuts, and treated using a patented Root Invigoration Program. By managing root zone moisture and installing a canopy mist system the tree condition was exceptional during relocation and re-establishment period. Relocated trees maintained their leaf crop and actually improved in color and appearance when compared to existing trees during the relocation effort.

Large Transplant being Loaded on Trailer for Relocation

Tree Placed Before Construction of Entry Drive

40” Live Oak placed in Final Location

Tree Preservation
The arboricultural management for the site included highly monitored construction activities, pre-excavation root cuts, irrigation monitoring, and a root invigoration program for the impacted trees. The trees were treated with a root treatment process using fungal compost and deep organic mulch, along with adequate root protection zones to maintain a high tree condition. Tree care also included ANSI A-300 crown cleaning and an 8-visit PHC tree health monitoring program.

Incorporating Fungal Compos and prescription nutrients in Preserved Tree Critical Root Zone

Final Rooting Zone Composition

View of a large live oak relocated to shade seating in the new concert venue area, with preserved trees in the background

Live Music Venue among the Simulated Oak Roots.

Three large live oaks that were relocated to preserve the site character and contribution.

40” dbh Relocated live oak in green area below “The Grove” venue.

Alleé of preserved trees below “The Grove” concert area.

This project deserves recognition due to the complex and highly skilled arboricultural techniques used to bring together the practical needs of the developer and the environmental needs of the community. Endeavor Real Estate Group, at great cost to the development, produced one of the most environmentally pleasing projects in the Austin Area. Southpark Meadows continues to be a live music venue, with an outdoor stage and ample seating under the large preserved oaks. The tree preservation and replanting efforts resulted in a project that is a model for intelligent and environmentally sensitive development through good design, project management, and a committed city staff.