MONTGOMERY COUNTY HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION
STAFF REPORT

Address:	3923 Prospect St., Kensington	**Meeting Date:**	11/12/2025
Resource:	Primary One Resource **Kensington Historic District**	**Report Date:**	11/5/2025
Applicant:	Helen Wilkes	**Public Notice:**	10/29/2025
Review:	Historic Area Work Permit	**Tax Credit:**	n/a
Permit Number:	1138162	**Staff:**	Dan Bruechert
PROPOSAL:	Tree Removal		

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends the HPC **approve with 1 (one) condition** the HAWP application with final approval authority to verify this condition has been satisfied delegated to Staff.

1. One hardwood canopy species tree must be planted on the subject lots within twelve months to mitigate the removal of trees #1 and #3. A site plan identifying the location and species of proposed trees must be submitted to Staff prior to issuance of the HAWP approval.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

SIGNIFICANCE: Primary One Resource within the Kensington Historic District
STYLE: Queen Anne
DATE: 1905

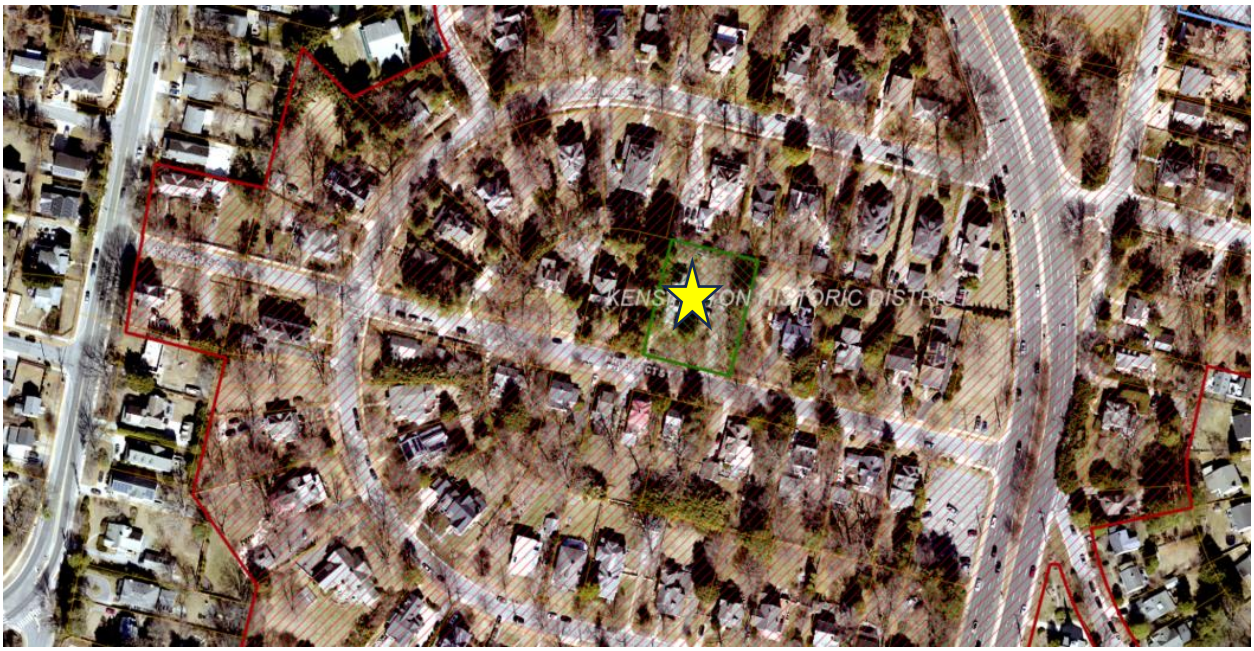


Figure 1: The subject property is located on the north side of Prospect St.

PROPOSAL

The applicant proposes to remove five (5) trees on the site.

The application also indicates the applicant proposes to repair the collapsed stone wall. This work is in-kind and does not require a HAWP.

APPLICABLE GUIDELINES

Kensington Historic District Guidelines

When reviewing alterations and new construction within the Kensington Historic District several documents are to be utilized as guidelines to assist the Commission in developing their decision. These documents include the *Approved & Adopted Amendment to the Master Plan for Historic Preservation: Kensington Historic District, Atlas #31/6* (*Amendment*), *Vision of Kensington: A Long-Range Preservation Plan* (*Vision*), *Montgomery County Code Chapter 24A* (*Chapter 24A*), and the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation (Standards).* The pertinent information in these documents is outlined below.

Approved & Adopted Amendment to the Master Plan for Historic Preservation: Kensington Historic District, Atlas #31/6

> The district is architecturally significant as a collection of late 19th and early 20th century houses that exhibit a variety of architectural styles popular during the Victorian period including Queen Anne, Shingle, Eastlake, and Colonial Revival. The houses share a uniformity of scale, setbacks, and construction materials that contribute to the cohesiveness of the district's streetscapes. This uniformity, coupled with the dominant design inherent in Warner's original plan of subdivision, conveys a strong sense of both time and place, that of a Victorian garden suburb.

Vision of Kensington: A Long-Range Preservation Plan

The HPC formally adopted the planning study, *Vision of Kensington: A Long-Range Preservation Plan*, and is directed by the Executive Regulations, which were approved by the County Council, to use this plan when considering changes and alterations to the Kensington Historic District. The goal of this preservation plan "was to establish a sound database of information from, which to produce a document that would serve the HPC, M-NCPPC, their staff and the community in wrestling with the protection of historic districts amidst the pressures of life in the 21st century." (page 1). The plan provides a specific physical description of the district as it is; an analysis of character-defining features of the district; a discussion of the challenges facing the district; and a discussion of proposed strategies for maintaining the character of the district while allowing for appropriate growth and change.

Montgomery County Code; Chapter 24A-8

(a) The commission shall instruct the director to deny a permit if it finds, based on the evidence and information presented to or before the commission that the alteration for which the permit is sought would be inappropriate, inconsistent with or detrimental to the preservation, enhancement or ultimate protection of the historic site or historic resource within an historic district, and to the purposes of this chapter.

(b) The commission shall instruct the director to issue a permit, or issue a permit subject to such conditions as are found to be necessary to ensure conformity with the purposes and requirements of this chapter, if it finds that:

(1) The proposal will not substantially alter the exterior features of an historic site or historic resource within an historic district; or

(2) The proposal is compatible in character and nature with the historical, archeological, architectural or cultural features of the historic site or the historic district in which an historic resource is located and would not be detrimental thereto or to the achievement of the purposes of this chapter; or

(3) The proposal would enhance or aid in the protection, preservation and public or private utilization of the historic site or historic resource located within an historic district in a manner compatible with the historical, archeological, architectural or cultural value of the historic site or historic district in which an historic resource is located; or

(4) The proposal is necessary in order that unsafe conditions or health hazards be remedied; or

(5) The proposal is necessary in order that the owner of the subject property not be deprived of reasonable use of the property or suffer undue hardship; or

(6) In balancing the interests of the public in preserving the historic site or historic resource located within an historic district, with the interests of the public from the use and benefit of the alternative proposal, the general public welfare is better served by granting the permit.

(c) It is not the intent of this chapter to limit new construction, alteration or repairs to any 1 period or architectural style.

(d) In the case of an application for work on an historic resource located within an historic district, the commission shall be lenient in its judgment of plans for structures of little historical or design significance or for plans involving new construction, unless such plans would seriously impair the historic or architectural value of surrounding historic resources or would impair the character of the historic district. (Ord. No. 9-4, § 1; Ord. No. 11-59.)

Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation:

The Secretary of the Interior defines rehabilitation as "the act or process of making possible a compatible use for a property through repair, alterations, and additions while preserving those portions or features, which convey its historical, cultural, or architectural values." The *Standards* are as follows:

2. The historic character of a property shall be retained and preserved. The removal of historic materials or alteration of features and spaces that characterize a property shall be avoided.
6. Deteriorated historic features will be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature will match the old in design, color, texture and, where possible, materials. Replacement of missing features will be substantiated by documentary and physical evidence.
9. New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction shall not destroy historic materials that characterize the property. The new work shall be differentiated from the old and shall be compatible with the massing, size, scale, and architectural features to protect the historic integrity of the property and its environment.

10. New additions and adjacent or related new construction shall be undertaken in such a manner that if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment would be unimpaired.

STAFF DISCUSSION

The subject property, a Primary Resource, is a double lot on Prospect St. Along with the neighbor at 3924 Baltimore St., the applicant proposes to remove five (five) trees from the rear of the property. The trees are as follows:

- 18" d.b.h. Maple (tree #1);
- 22" d.b.h. Mulberry (tree #2);
- 16" d.b.h. Maple (tree #3);
- 23" d.b.h. Maple (tree #4); and
- 12" d.b.h. Cherry (tree #5).

The submitted application includes a detailed write-up on each of the trees and the information was compiled with input from an arborist.

Trees #1 and #3 – Both of these trees are impacting the existing privacy fence at the rear of the property, but the larger rationale to remove these trees is that they are likely to be impacted by the construction of a garage that is anticipated at a future date. The health of both of these trees is good. Staff understands the desire to retain the existing fence and to remove all of the trees at the same time as a cost saving measure; however, Staff cannot base its recommendation on a potential future action (the construction of a garage).

Staff acknowledges that these two trees are at the rear of the property where they will have less impact on the district's overall tree canopy and recognizes the applicant's commitment to preserving the character of the Kensington Historic District; however, Staff does not find sufficient justification to recommend approval of these two trees without some measure of mitigation. The application states that the applicants would like to plant additional trees in the future, but Staff finds this speculative action is insufficient to make up for the loss of these trees.

Based on the trees modest size and their location at the rear of the property, Staff finds that removing trees #1 and #3 will not have a substantial impact on the overall character of the surrounding historic district. However, to support and promote the tree canopy that is a characteristic of the Kensington Historic District, Staff recommends the HPC add a condition to the approval of removing trees #1 and #3 that requires planting one hardwood canopy-species tree within twelve months each tree removed. With the recommended condition, Staff supports the removal of trees #1 and #3 under 24A-8(b)(2), the *Vision of Kensington*, and *Standard #2*.

Tree #2 – As noted in the application, the tree has significant deadwood in its crown and its roots are impacting an existing outbuilding. Staff additionally notes that Mulberries are an invasive species. Staff finds its removal will protect the foundation of the existing accessory structure and due to its location at the rear of the property, its removal will not substantially impact the mature tree canopy that is characteristic of the Kensington Historic District. Staff recommends approval under 24A-8(b)(2) and (4) and *Standard #2*.

Tree #4 – The application indicates that this tree is damaging a garden compost structure the application refers to as "historic" in the rear of the property. While Staff was unable to find any documentation of this structure prior to a 1998 HAWP application, based on the fieldstone and concrete construction method and overall material condition, Staff finds this landscape feature is generally consistent with late

19th or early 20th century construction; however, the feature should not be considered character-defining for the site nor should the disposition of the garden structure dictate whether or not the tree should be removed. The proposal is to remove this tree and repair the structure. Staff supports the removal of this maple tree in the rear yard. Staff recommends approval under 24A-8(b)(2) and (4) and *Standard #2*.

Tree #5 – This tree is constructed immediately adjacent to an outbuilding and is leaning next to the existing accessory structure. This accessory structure was originally associated with 3920 Baltimore St. but was relocated from its historic location when the HPC approved the construction of the 3922 Baltimore St. in 2000.[1] Staff is unsure of the exact date of construction of this accessory structure, but notes it is shown on the 1924 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of Kensington. Staff finds that the root system of this tree will likely damage the foundation of the historic outbuilding and its removal is necessary to protect the resource. Staff recommends approval under 24A-8(b)(2) and (4) and *Standard #2*.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Commission **approve with 1 (one) condition** the HAWP application with final approval authority delegated to Staff;

1. One hardwood canopy species tree must be planted on the subject lots within twelve months to mitigate the removal of trees #1 and #3. A site plan identifying the location and species of proposed trees must be submitted to Staff prior to issuance of the HAWP approval.;

under the Criteria for Issuance in Chapter 24A-8(b)(2) having found that the proposal, is consistent with the *Vision of Kensington*, and therefore will not substantially alter the exterior features of the historic resource and is compatible in character with the district and the purposes of Chapter 24A;

and with the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation* #2;

and with the general condition that the applicant shall present an electronic set of drawings, if applicable, to Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) staff for review and stamping prior to submission for the Montgomery County Department of Permitting Services (DPS) building permits;

and with the general condition that final project design details, not specifically delineated by the Commission, shall be approved by HPC staff or brought back to the Commission as a revised HAWP application at staff's discretion;

and with the general condition that the applicant shall notify the Historic Preservation staff if they propose to make any alterations to the approved plans. Once the work is completed the applicant will contact the staff person assigned to this application at 301-563-3408 or dan.bruechert@montgomeryplanning.org to schedule a follow-up site visit.

[1] The project file for the infill construction and accessory structure relocation at 3922 Baltimore St. is available here: https://mcatlas.org/tiles/06_HistoricPreservation_PhotoArchives/Padlock/HAR60640003/Box012/31-6-00K_Kensington%20Historic%20District_3920%20Baltimore%20Avenue_09-13-2000.pdf.

FOR STAFF ONLY:
HAWP#_____
DATE ASSIGNED_____

APPLICATION FOR HISTORIC AREA WORK PERMIT

HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION
301.563.3400

APPLICANT:

Name: Helen Wilkes E-mail: hcrettierwilkes@gmail.com

Address: 3923 Prospect Street City: Kensington Zip: 20895

Daytime Phone: 3014046700 Tax Account No.: 03377812

AGENT/CONTACT (if applicable):

Name: _____ E-mail: _____

Address: _____ City: _____ Zip:_____

Daytime Phone: _____ Contractor Registration No.: _____

LOCATION OF BUILDING/PREMISE: MIHP # of Historic Property_____

Is the Property Located within an Historic District? X Yes/District Name Kensington
__No/Individual Site Name_____

Is there an Historic Preservation/Land Trust/Environmental Easement on the Property? If YES, include a map of the easement, and documentation from the Easement Holder supporting this application.

Are other Planning and/or Hearing Examiner Approvals /Reviews Required as part of this Application? (Conditional Use, Variance, Record Plat, etc.?) If YES, include information on these reviews as supplemental information.

Building Number: 3923 Street: Prospect Street

Town/City: Kensington Nearest Cross Street: Connecticut Ave.

Lot: _____ Block: _____ Subdivision: _____ Parcel: _____

TYPE OF WORK PROPOSED: See the checklist on Page 4 to verify that all supporting items for proposed work are submitted with this application. Incomplete Applications will not be accepted for review. Check all that apply:

- ☐ New Construction
- ☐ Addition
- ☐ Demolition
- ☐ Grading/Excavation
- ☐ Deck/Porch
- ☐ Fence
- ☐ Hardscape/Landscape
- ☐ Roof
- ☐ Shed/Garage/Accessory Structure
- ☐ Solar
- ☑ Tree removal/planting
- ☐ Window/Door
- ☐ Other:_____

I hereby certify that I have the authority to make the foregoing application, that the application is correct and accurate and that the construction will comply with plans reviewed and approved by all necessary agencies and hereby acknowledge and accept this to be a condition for the issuance of this permit.

Helen C. Wilkes — Signature of owner or authorized agent

October 22, 2025 — Date

HAWP APPLICATION: MAILING ADDRESSES FOR NOTIFING [Owner, Owner's Agent, Adjacent and Confronting Property Owners]	
Owner's mailing address 3923 Prospect Street Kensington, MD 20895	**Owner's Agent's** mailing address
Adjacent and confronting Property Owners mailing addresses	
3923 Prospect Street Kensington, MD 20895 3918 Prospect Street Kensington, MD 20895	John and Carrie Willimann 3924 Baltimore St. Kensington, MD 20895 3922 Prospect Street Kensington, MD 20895
3927 Prospect Street Kensington, MD 20895 3924 Prospect Street Kensington, MD 20895	3922 Baltimore St. Kensington, MD 20895
3915 Prospect Street Kensington, MD 20895	3928 Baltimore St. Kensington, MD 20895

Description of Property: Please describe the building and surrounding environment. Include information on significant structures, landscape features, or other significant features of the property:

The owners of the two properties joined at their rear property line, at 3923 Prospect St. and 3924 Baltimore St., are requesting approval to remove five trees located at or near the property line between our two properties. All of these mature trees are presumed to have been volunteers, and they have received little attention over the years due to their locations at the rear-most part of each of the properties. They have, however, grown more crowded and intrusive over time, to the detriment of each, as they increasingly react to and tilt away from structures and/or adjacent trees with which they are competing for sunlight and territory. There are varying degrees of dead and decaying wood in each of them. We believe that it is time to address these increasingly unsustainable circumstances by removing the trees.

Description of Work Proposed: Please give an overview of the work to be undertaken:

Remove the trees and their stumps.

Work Item 1: Remove five trees

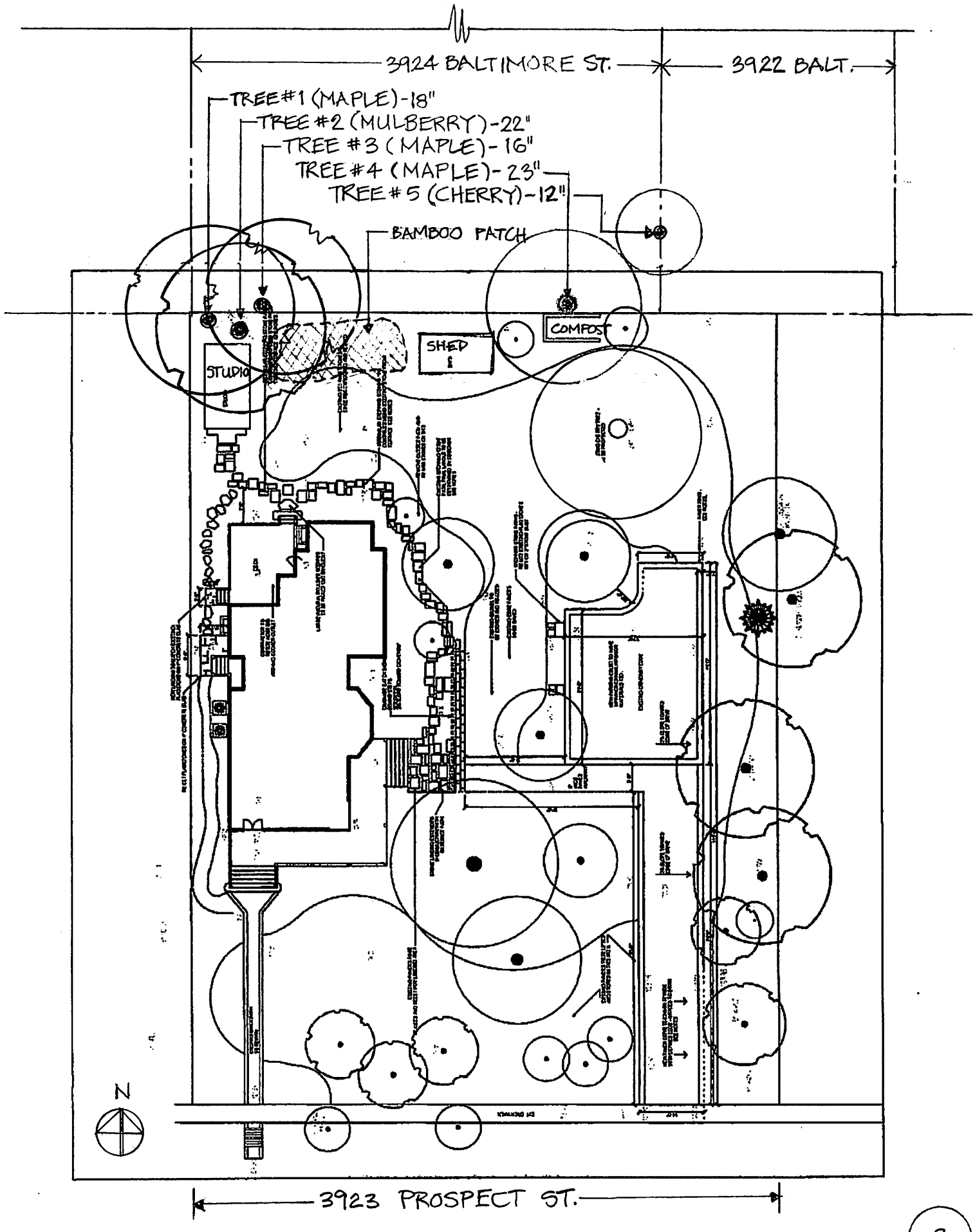
Description of Current Condition:	Proposed Work:
Each tree is compromised by as well as compromising to adjacent trees and structures, as described above and in attached documents.	Remove each tree and its stump.

Work Item 2: Repair collapsed stone wall

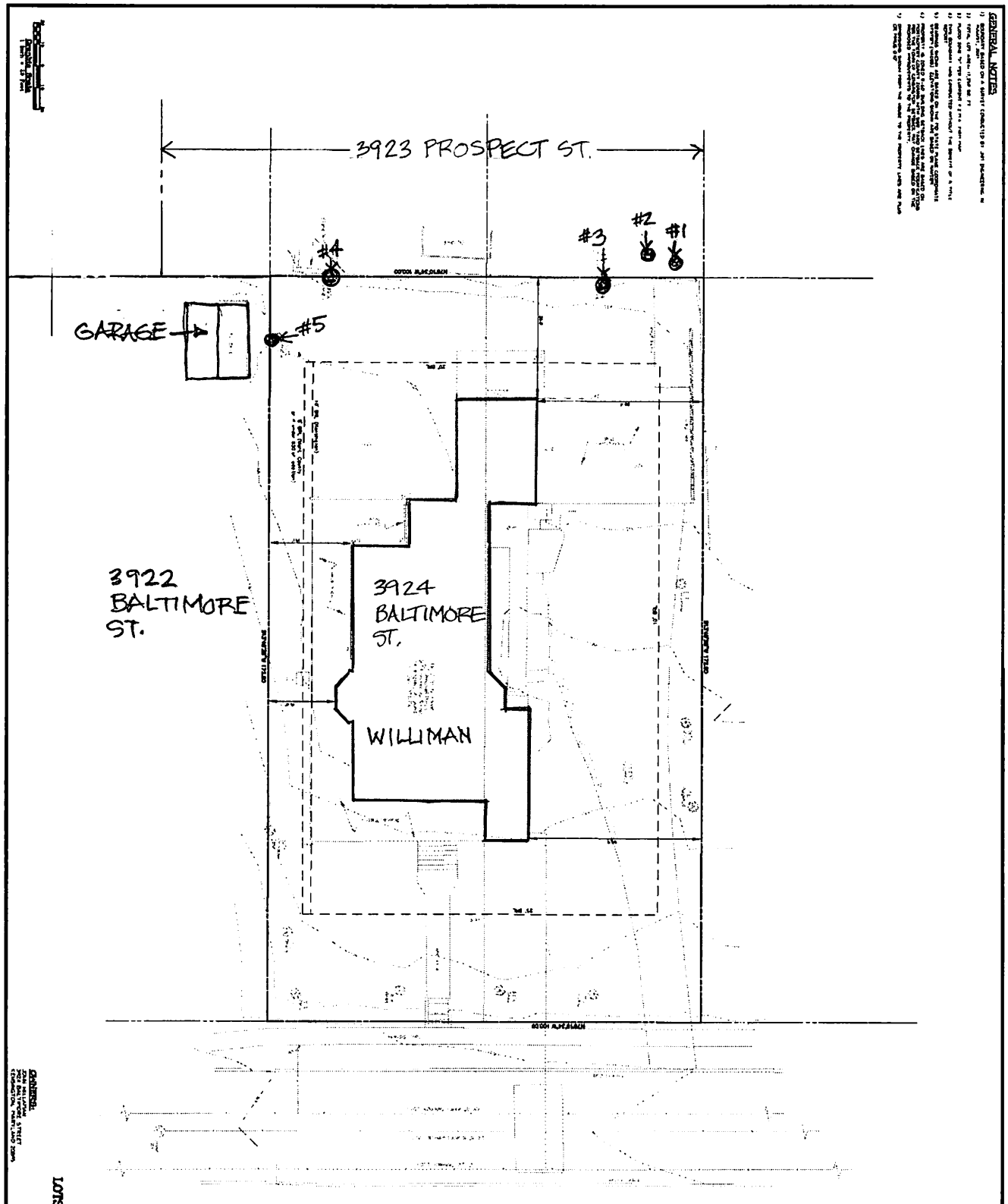
Description of Current Condition:	Proposed Work:
Original three-sided stone compost pile wall has been caved in by the intrusive tree growing into it on its north side. This structure is a historic landscape feature of 3923 Prospect Street.	Repair collapsed stone compost pile wall.

Work Item 3: _____

Description of Current Condition:	Proposed Work:


3924 BALTIMORE ST.
3922 BALT.
TREE #1 (MAPLE) - 18"
TREE #2 (MULBERRY) - 22"
TREE #3 (MAPLE) - 16"
TREE #4 (MAPLE) - 23"
TREE #5 (CHERRY) - 12"
BAMBOO PATCH
STUDIO
SHED
COMPOST
N
3923 PROSPECT ST.

2.



GENERAL NOTES

VICINITY MAP
SCALE: 1"= 2000'

3924 BALTIMORE STREET
LOTS 23 & 24, BLOCK 11, PLAT B/4
CURRENT DEED 66805/97
KENSINGTON PARK
TOPO BASESHEET

1 OF 1

JNM ENGINEERING, LLC
CIVIL ENGINEERING, SURVEYING, LAND PLANNING,
ENVIRONMENTAL, AGRICOLA TURF, LEED PROFESSIONALS
105 LEAFY HOLLOW CIRCLE, MOUNT AIRY, MD 21771
(301) 514-2608, JNMENGINEERING@COMCAST.NET

LOT 23 & 24, BLOCK 11, PLAT B/4
3924 BALTIMORE STREET
ACCT# 13-01019178, TAX MAP NP43
KENSINGTON, MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND
TOPO BASESHEET

DATE	BY	REVISION

PROJECT	XXX
DRAWN BY	JWW
SCALE	1"=20'
DATE	XXX
ENGINEERING	JWW
APPROVED	JWW

1.

Tree Removal Project Description
3923 Prospect St. and 3924 Baltimore St., Kensington

John Willimann, as an owner of the property at 3924 Baltimore Street in Kensington, and I, Helen Wilkes, as an owner of the property at 3923 Prospect Street, are requesting approval to remove five trees located at or near the property line between our two properties. All of these mature trees are presumed to have been volunteers, and they have received little notice over the years due to their locations at the rear-most part of each of the properties. They have, however, grown more crowded over time as they increasingly react to and tilt away from adjacent structures and/or trees with which they are competing for sunlight and territory. There is evidence of significant decay and decline in at least two of the trees. We believe that it is time to address these increasingly unsustainable circumstances by removing

I have consulted with an arborist at Davey Trees, Tom Kolick, whom I have dealt with and trusted for several years, to inform the decisions we have come to here. He has helped me care for all the trees on my property, with services provided by contract on an annual basis.

The list of trees to be removed (below) is keyed to the two site plan diagrams (one for each property) as well as the photos which are included in this HAWP application.

Tree #1 (Maple): Located at NW corner of 3923 Prospect, abutting the stockade fence between the two properties. If possible, we would like to save this tree, which seems mostly healthy but leans heavily away from the adjacent Mulberry tree (Tree #2). Most of its crown tilts in a northwesterly direction over the adjacent rear corners of two Baltimore St. properties (3924 and 3928) due to crowding by the mulberry tree. We are requesting conditional approval for this tree to be removed, should it be determined that its root system will pose problems when the Willimans build a garage in the vicinity of that rear corner of their property, as they intend to do. (They have plans but have not yet submitted for HAWP approval.) It's also possible that this tree will be destabilized by the removal of the other two nearby trees and some, if not all, of the roots of those trees.

Tree #2 (Mulberry): Located at rear of 3923 Prospect side of stockade fence, next to Tree #1. It is the center tree of the three which are clustered together, to the detriment of each. There is significant dead wood in the crown; its roots are impinging on the foundation of the outbuilding (studio) located at that corner; and the trunk and crown lean heavily toward the Baltimore Street property as well as into the canopies of the two flanking maples (Trees #1 and #3).

Tree #3 (Maple): Located at rear of 3924 Baltimore St. property, it is growing into and damaging the stockade fence located between the two properties. The tree's roots abut both properties. Its canopy overlaps significantly with Trees #1 and #2. Its root system will definitely be impacted significantly by the anticipated construction of a garage on the Willimans' property.

Tree #4 (Maple): Located at the property line between 3924 Baltimore and 3923 Prospect, this tree is slowly destroying the north wall of a three-sided, open stone wall structure located at the rear of 3923 Prospect, which contains a compost pile. It is a historic landscape feature of the property. The tree's trunk, which tilts heavily toward the Willimans' rear yard, and its root system are caving the wall in toward the compost pile. Its root system has expanded increasingly over the last few years to invade the compost contained within the stone structure, such that it is difficult to dig. The tree has dropped at least one large branch onto the rear yard of 3924 Baltimore in recent years as well as dead-wood debris, regularly. The tree's growth has further been affected in reaction to the huge canopy of the Yoshino cherry tree to its south, located on 3923 Prospect, which tilts heavily into this maple's canopy.

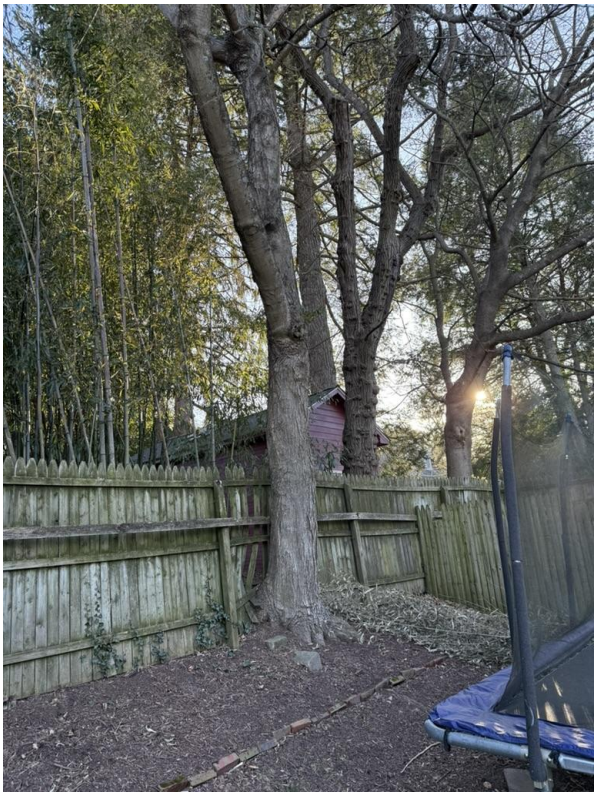
Tree #5 (Cherry): Located at the property line between 3924 and 3922 Baltimore (next door), it leans away from Tree #4 and toward the corner garage at the rear of 3922 Baltimore in search of more light. It's situated on a slightly humped ridge between the two properties which has a longer slope on the garage side due to the lower ground level adjacent to the garage. This contributes to the tilting of the tree toward the garage as its roots grow into the hump where it is rooted. The owners of 3922 would like to see that tree removed, for reasons of safety. Its trunk is also covered with ivy, which has, over time, further compromised the health of the tree.

Other considerations:

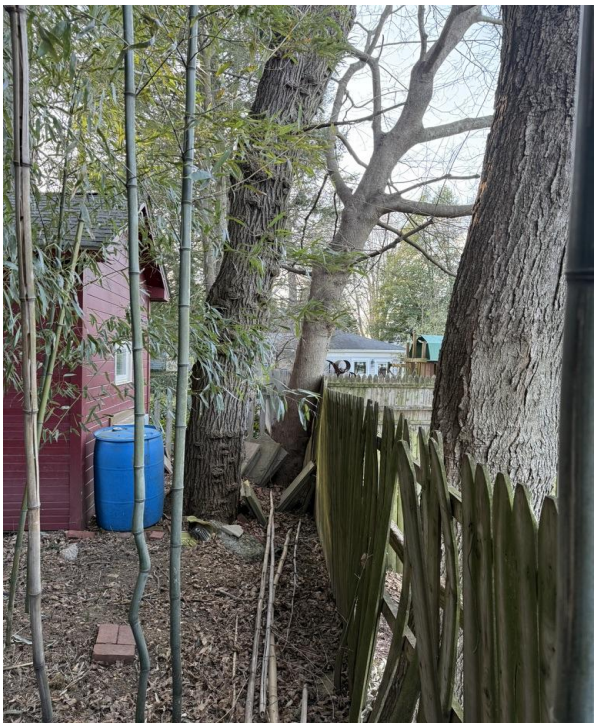
- We request approval to remove up to five trees all at once, due to the need to use a crane and/or other heavy equipment to remove each of them. Access for this equipment will necessarily be through the Willimans' property. While most of these trees have contributed all the benefits that mature trees can confer over many years, they have, unfortunately, each become increasingly more problematic than beneficial, for reasons outlined above.
- The property owners all care about and have cared for and maintained the trees on their properties regularly.
- 3923 Prospect currently holds 21 additional trees of various sizes and ages. We have added, over 36+ years, most of these trees. We have also shared in the care of trees along or between our property and our next door neighbors' properties on both sides.
- 3923 Prospect Street has a large stand of bamboo at the rear of the property, which runs roughly between the two rear outbuildings and is in decline, in addition to being very invasive. (The Willimans can attest to this.) We have started the process of thinning the bamboo with the goal of removing it completely over the next year and will also restore the soil, as is necessary – a process which takes time - so that the area can receive up to three new trees in place of the bamboo. My goal is to plant native trees that can grow and thrive in that location indefinitely.

Tree Images

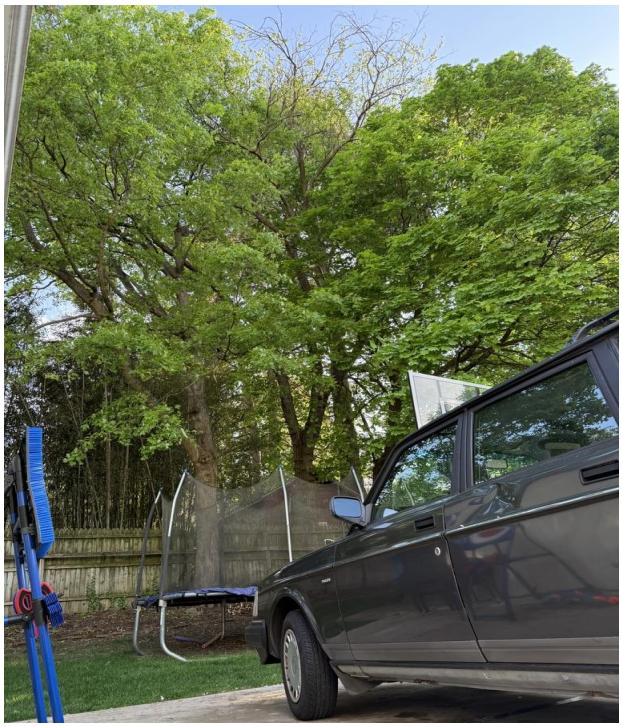
Left to right: Trees #2 and #1 as viewed from 3924 Baltimore St. side of fence



View of tree #3 (foreground) with #2 & #1 (located on 3923 Prospect St. side) as viewed from 3924 Baltimore St.

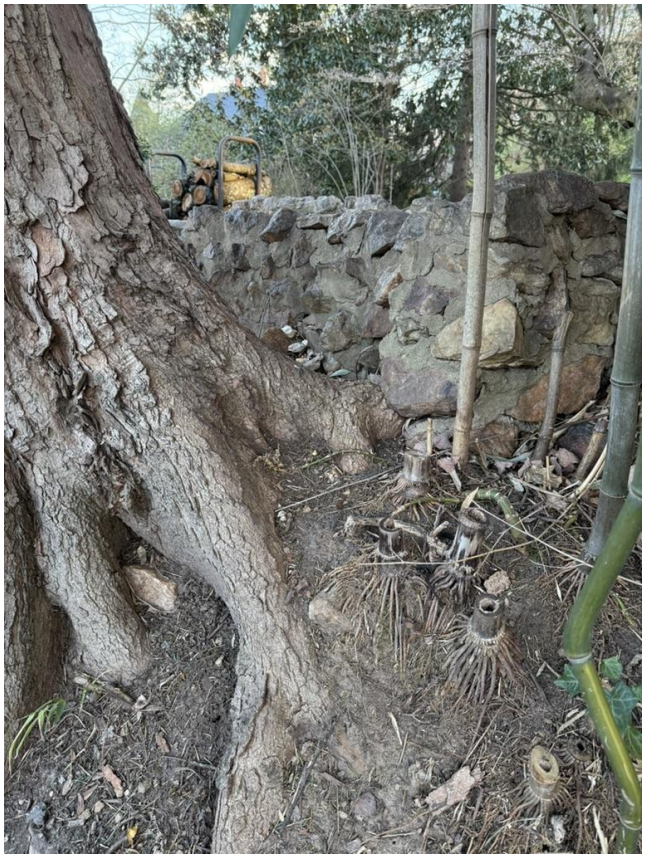


Left to right: Tree #2 & #1, along left side of fence; Tree #3, on right side of fence



Tree #2 (Mulberry) has extensive dead wood in its canopy, as seen protruding at center of three-tree canopy

Tree #4, situated at rear of 3924 Baltimore, is intruding into, and collapsing, the old stone wall of the compost pile at the rear of 3923 Prospect St.



Tree #3, in foreground; Tree #4, seen from a distance and tilting heavily into rear yard of 3924 Baltimore St; and Tree #5, in distance, as seen against garage at 3922 Baltimore St.

Tree #5, close-up

September 22nd, 2025

Dear Historic Preservation Commissioners and Staff:

I am writing to express my wife's and my full support for the application that is being filed on our behalf by our neighbors Helen and Sandy Wilkes. The Wilkes and we share a property border at the rear of our property at 3924 Baltimore Street, Kensington, Maryland.

We are applying to remove up to five trees that either straddle or sit along the property line between our homes. We have discussed the trees between us extensively and have deliberated together at length over the removal of the ones proposed in this application.

We appreciate your consideration of this application and intend to share costs for removal of these trees, upon approval, since they impact both of our properties.

Sincerely,

John A. Willimann

3924 Baltimore Street
Kensington, MD 20895