

Date: March 31, 2008



TO: Board Members – Vancouver Park Board
FROM: General Manager – Parks and Recreation
SUBJECT: Stanley Park Hollow Tree

RECOMMENDATION

THAT the Board approve the taking down of the “Hollow Tree”, as it has become a public safety concern.

BACKGROUND

The “Hollow Tree” is a veteran cedar snag on the west side of Stanley Park. Cedars, with age, rot from the inside out, and most old specimens are hollow at the base. In this case, a portion of the circumference also rotted or was shattered by a lightening strike, leaving a doorway to the hollow core. For the last century, this anomaly has been the subject of thousands of amateur photographs of people standing in the hollow.

DISCUSSION

The Hollow Tree is actually a dead snag and has been for a long time. The illusion of a green canopy was in fact three hemlocks which were growing out of the deadwood in the cedar root flair. The eastern half of the root flair has rotted away, resulting in the 11-degree lean of this 13 meter snag. Early photos show the tree standing erect. The trunk is also vertically cracked and in some places separated; akin to the staves of a barrel. Cabling, bolts and braces have been added over the past 30 years to keep the trunk together.

The winter storms of 2006/2007 not only downed thousands of living trees but also caused the Hollow Tree to further splinter and lean. As a result, staff monitored the tree throughout 2007 to watch for further deterioration. The storms of last winter resulted in further cracking, and staff determined that the snag had become a safety risk to the public. The area around the snag has been fenced off, and a structural engineering firm was retained to assess the possibility of saving the “Hollow Tree.” The recommendation was for a series of large external steel braces to counter act the 11-degree lean. To internally brace the tree would require attempting to return the snag to a vertical position. This would require cutting the remaining roots and an artificial build-up of the missing root flair on the east side. Because of the barrel stave nature of the trunk, there is a high probability it would break apart without numerous significant steel collars, inside and out. Even with these efforts, there is no assurance of success.

Hence, the external steel braces (APPENDIX 1) are the only reasonably certain solution. However, they will ruin the aesthetics of the setting as they would be right in front of the hollow opening, discouraging family photos.

CONCLUSION

The “Hollow Tree” has become a safety risk for the hundreds who stand in front of it to take photos. The engineered solution to stabilize the snag will ruin the aesthetics of the site and greatly diminish the attraction of the tree.

The snag will continue to deteriorate over time at an accelerated rate. Therefore, staff recommend that the snag be taken down, whole if possible, and laid as two longitudinal pieces that visitors can walk between to appreciate its size. The trunk would be cut about 200mm above the ground plane with the lower root flair becoming a symbolic planter for a new single cedar planted at its centre.

A number of interpretive concepts will be developed to provide the history of changes that time and nature has brought to bear on the “Hollow Tree”.

Prepared by:

JDL/yf
Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation
Vancouver, BC

APPENDIX 1

Hollow Tree with External Steel Braces

