



Staff Report
March 11, 2024

Davis Meeker Oak

Summary

Due to recent branch failures, the historic Davis Meeker Oak tree, located adjacent to the Olympia Regional Airport on Old Highway 99, was evaluated by the City Tree Professional with a detailed analysis of the tree to determine its health and condition. That assessment returned findings that are concerns from a liability and risk management perspective.

Background

In June 2023, an 18-inch diameter branch failed about 50 feet from the ground and fell in a parking lot on Port of Olympia owned property. A visual inspection showed there was rot where the failed branch connected to the main stem of the tree.

There are multiple targets this tree can impact in the event of future failures, including a historic hangar, parking areas, a state highway with significant traffic, and power lines. Because of the nature of the rot in the failed branch, and the numerous structures, vehicles, and people that must move under the tree, the City Tree Professional, Kevin McFarland, was retained to do a detailed analysis of the health of the tree.

That analysis included retaining a climbing arborist to do an assessment of the upper story of the tree, and a sonic tomography analysis that can “see” inside the tree to determine the presence of rot in the interior of the tree. Both analyses showed significant rot in the mainstem and scaffold branches of the tree that make future failures of the tree likely.

One option detailed in the report is to do a dramatic crown pruning, called a retrenchment pruning, of the tree to take about 15 feet off all the branches of the tree. This would reduce the weight and the wind loading on the weakened mainstem and branches. This option would significantly alter the appearance of the tree, introduce new areas for rot to take hold in the tree, and would require additional expenses every five years to prune again and to complete new sonic tomography studies to assess ongoing risk of failure. More information on this option can be found in the attached tree evaluation report.

The Tree Professional for the city has recommended tree removal over retrenchment pruning. The rationale for this recommendation is removing this amount of tree by retrenchment pruning would significantly alter the appearance of the tree and would add considerable cost for ongoing testing and retrenchment pruning every five years. The risk of failure of the tree would remain high, and there are multiple targets that could be impacted in the event of failure. In addition, the tree has reached the end of its effective life, retrenchment pruning is not recommended.

This is a briefing in advance of the Historic Commission

Public Approval Process

The Davis Meeker Oak was placed on the Tumwater Register of Historic Places in 1995. Tree removal would require delisting the tree from the Historic Register, which in turn requires the Historic Preservation Commission to hold a public hearing and make a recommendation to the City Council for consideration.

Because the tree is in the right of way, and thus owned by the City, and must be de-listed from the register. the City Council has the final decision-making authority on delisting after receiving a recommendation from the Historic Preservation Commission.

If the tree is delisted, a tree removal permit would be issued by Community Development as a hazardous tree. The tree removal permit would include mitigation in the form of planting new Garry Oak trees. Parks and Recreation staff have already collected acorns from the Davis Meeker Oak, and new trees have sprouted from the acorns and are being raised as eventual replacement trees.

The Historic Preservation Commission and the Tree Board will meet jointly to discuss the most effective methods to commemorate and preserve the history of the tree, as well as examining the potential for possible use of any reclaimed wood.

Public Notification

Stakeholders have been notified regarding this issue and made aware of opportunities to review and comment on the proposal.

Review and Approval Criteria

The Historic Preservation Commission will hold a public hearing and make a recommendation on de-listing the tree from the Historic Register for City Council consideration.

The Transportation& Engineering Department has submitted an application for tree removal.

The Community Development would issue a permit for tree removal once delisted from the Historic Register. The Tumwater Municipal Code allows the removal of any hazardous tree that is evaluated and found to be a hazard with an administrative tree waiver permit.

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