



Town of Yountville
"The Heart of the Napa Valley"

MEDIA RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Date: November 25, 2008

Contact: Myke Praul, Public Works Director/Town Engineer
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Subject: Review of Health Condition of Heritage Oak along Hopper Creek Pathway

Consistent with direction from the Town Council, Town staff has developed and implemented the beginning steps of a Town Forestation Plan. The initial efforts include inventorying and managing the existing heritage oak trees in town along with development of a new planting program to facilitate the cycle of growth of these majestic trees for future generations to enjoy.

At their December 2nd meeting, the Yountville Town Council will review the Town arborist's report regarding the health of the large Heritage Oak tree located along the Hopper Creek pathway behind the Hopper Creek Condominiums. This Valley Oak is over 70 inches in diameter and is one of the larger oaks in the Napa Valley likely between 250 and 280 years old. The Town's arborist has conducted drill testing on the trunk of the tree and determined that this tree has become unstable and should be removed due to the potential damage to adjoining property or injury or loss of life that would likely result from significant limb's falling from the tree or the whole tree itself falling. Other options, including the estimated cost of the options and the estimate on likely success in maintaining the tree will be presented to the Town Council for their review before making any decision related to the fate of this tree.

Should the Council decide to have the tree removed, staff is recommending consideration of a photo memorial and interpretative panel explaining the history and life cycle of Oak tree's which could be located in the vicinity of the tree. Town staff would also recommend appropriate mitigation for the removal of the tree by requiring the planting of new young oaks in the Hopper Creek riparian areas or in other locations within the Town.

"Removal of one of this majestic oak tree leaves a large hole in the Town's Forestation Plan and is a very emotional loss" stated Town Manager Steve Rogers, "But an overriding consideration for the Council is the safety of our residents which is currently compromised with use of the pathway not to mention the hazard leaving the tree would present to residents adjacent to the tree in the Hopper Creek Condominium community."

The public is welcomed to attend the Council meeting next Tuesday night, December 2nd, starting at about 6:30 pm to express their views on this decision. Copies of the staff report and related arborist reports are available on the Town's web-site at www.townofyountville.com click under Town Council then Town Clerk, Council Agendas and Staff Reports and select the December 2, 2008 meeting.

END



October 9, 2008

Myke Praul
Town of Yountville
6550 Yount Street
Yountville, CA 94599

Arborist Report

Re: Oak tree exam

Dear Myke,

You requested that I perform an examination of the large valley oak by Hopper Creek near Hopper Creek Village. With your approval, I enlisted the services of MD Tree Specialists, Inc. to perform the aerial portion of the exam under my supervision. We completed the examination yesterday.

The results of the exam showed that significant decay and structural defects exist in the trunk and every major limb. In my judgement the tree presents a very high risk of trunk and limb failures. The recreation path and a peripheral area on the Hopper Creek Village property are targets that would be struck when the tree fails.

My observations from the ground on October 1 were as follows:

The tree is a 79.7" DBH¹ valley oak (*Quercus lobata*), located on the top of the west bank of Hopper Creek, approximately 750' from the Yount Street bridge. The tree shows fair to good vigor². The root collar was covered with vegetation on three sides, and slightly buried by the rec. path. There is an open cavity on the east side of the trunk, extending from 5 1/2' to about 15' above ground. It is about 3' wide at its widest point. The cavity extends as an open crack behind a pair of low limbs, about 12" and 16" diameter on the south west side. These branches are over the rec. path and an ivy bed on the Hopper Creel Village property.

The lowest north limb, over the creek, is about 24" diameter. It has a large top-side wound with inner wood protruding where a large branch was removed long ago. The outer portion of this limb is heavy with foliage and crowded branches.

The next higher north limb over the creek has an open cavity on the top side, with an active honeybee colony in the cavity.

¹ DBH: Diameter at Breast height, 4.5' above ground or just below the first limb

² Vigor is a measure of a tree's current health and ability to withstand pests and diseases. It is not a measure of structural stability. The range of vigor is: Excellent, Good, Fair, Poor, Dying, Dead.

Numerous old pruning wounds are evident on the upper trunk and limbs. Some are now closed and some are closing.

On October 8 I met with Certified Arborists Matt McClure and Danny Elkins of MD Tree Specialists, Inc. to excavate and examine the root collar and to perform an aerial examination of the trunk and limbs.

Our observations were as follows:

Root Collar and Buttress Roots

After clearing blackberry vines away from the trunk and root collar, we excavated to a depth of about 6" near the path and on the top of the creek bank, revealing the tops of the buttress roots.

Tapping with a mallet, the lower trunk and buttress roots generally sounded solid. Visual examination found that one small buttress root on the east side is not intact, i. e. it does not connect with the ground.

Drilling downward at about 45 degrees into 7 main buttress roots with a 1/8" X 12" bit I found the following:

1. South-most buttress root: Solid white wood to the full length of the bit (11").
2. South west buttress root near the rec path: Solid white wood to the full length of the bit.
3. West buttress root near the rec path: No resistance at a depth of about 6". The drill bit apparently struck a rock and broke off.
4. North west buttress root, further from the path: Solid white wood to the full length of the bit.
5. North east buttress root: About 9" depth of firm white wood, followed by softer, light brown wood.
6. North buttress root, low on the creek bank: 7" depth of firm white wood. No resistance at 7" depth.
7. South east buttress root: Firm white wood to the full length of the bit.

Trunk

A large vertical area on the north east side of the trunk is slightly concave and the bark is dead and loose.

Drilling into the trunk at four locations at about 4 feet above ground I found the following:

1. North side: 10" of firm white wood; softer darker wood at 11".
2. South side: 9" of firm white wood; softer darker wood beyond 9" depth.
3. West side: Firm white wood to 7"; firm brown wood at 8" - 10"
4. East side: 6" of firm white wood; firm, tan wood at 7" - 10"

Aerial Exam

Matt McClure performed the aerial exam under my supervision. Our findings were as follows:

- At the open cavity in the trunk, the walls of wood surrounding the cavity form a very irregular wall thickness up to about 12", with many deep fissures in the wall. The cavity extends through to daylight on the topside of the pair of low, southern limbs over the path. The opening is about 14" in diameter.
- The west most 16" diameter low limb over the path has an open, top side crack.
- The north west, central limb arching north has an active bee colony in a column of decay. The limb is about 30" diameter and the column of decay is about 20" diameter. The opening into the cavity and bee hive is about 24" long and 10" wide.
- The low north limb over the creek has an open 6" diameter hole into a cavity on the top side, about 20' from the trunk. There is an active bee colony in the cavity.
- A high, west limb has a cavity where the diameter is about 20", with an active bee colony, about 40' above ground.
- A large eastern, 34" diameter limb over the creek has an open crack over the top side.
- A 36" diameter south limb, parallel to the path has a top side, spiral crack 4' long with plants growing out of it.
- An eastern upright 30" diameter limb over the creek has an open cavity, revealing a 14" diameter column of decay.
- In all there are 6 active honey bee colonies in cavities in the limbs

Discussion and Conclusions

Results of the drill exam indicate probable significant strength loss in 3 of the 7 buttress roots examined. I consider this to represent a significant overall loss of strength in the anchorage of the tree.

With a trunk diameter of about 80" a wall of sound wood about 12" thick would be considered sufficient to support this full-canopy tree. Four drill sites in lower trunk indicate altered, softer wood at depths of 7 to 11". Visual examination inside the trunk cavity showed that the wall of wood remaining in the trunk is roughly 12" thick with deep fissures in the wood. Therefore, I do not consider the remaining walls of wood sufficiently thick and sound to support the tree in the event of added strain such as heavy wind or unexpected partial failure of the trunk or roots.

Every major limb examined shows evidence of significant defects or decay. While some of the limbs are above wild and unoccupied areas along the creek, and in a peripheral area on the Hopper Creek Village property, large limbs with significant decay are directly above a paved recreational path that is actively used by the public.

In my judgement, the most likely failure would be in the upper trunk or large limbs.

Mitigation Options

Removal of the entire tree would be the most effective course of action. Because the tree is highly prized by the community, other options may be considered.

Considering that significant defects exist in the roots, trunk and all major limbs, I do not consider cable systems to be appropriate for this tree. Introduction of a cable system would be likely to lead to multiple limb failure rather than a single limb failure. Several of the limbs exhibiting significant defects are far too high to be propped.

Pruning to reduce weight and windsail may have value, but drastic reduction would be unsightly and would remove excessive amounts of foliage production that is necessary for the health of the tree. Gradual reduction over a course of years would be more appropriate. The risk of the tree falling would remain throughout, and to some extent after, completion of the reduction process.

Another option would be to close off public access to the area under and near the tree. This would be all of the space within about 90 feet of the trunk in all directions. It would require closure of the recreation path, or perhaps routing the portion near the tree through the Hopper Creek Village property if they would permit it.

A final option would be constructing a steel frame over the recreation path under and near the tree that would protect people using the path. Such an endeavor would require study and design by an engineering firm.

Recommendations

1. Temporarily close the recreation path.
2. Contact Hopper Creek Village Homeowners Association regarding risks presented by the tree and options for mitigation. Ascertain whether or not they are willing to agree to an easement for the recreation path and to close off access under and near the tree on their property in the interest of safety while retaining the tree.
3. Obtain estimates for tree removal, re-routing the path and constructing a protective arbor.
4. Determine the Town's preferred course of action.
5. If the tree is to be retained, regardless of recreation path options, prune for 10% crown reduction every two years by removing outer branches back to lateral branches.

Prepared by

Bill Pramuk
RCA #409



Bill Pramuk
TREE AND GARDEN VITALITY

October 10, 2008

OCT 14 2008

Myke Praul
Town of Yountville
6550 Yount Street
Yountville, CA 94599

Re: Hopper Creek valley oak exam

Dear Myke,

I completed the exam and report regarding the large valley oak by Hopper Creek. As you will see, I find that the tree has numerous structural problems with the most likely point of failure to be the upper trunk or limbs.

For public safety I am recommending that the path be closed while the risk is being mitigated.

The report offers several options for attempting to retain the tree while acting responsibly in favor of public safety.

One of the options is the installation of a protective frame over the recreation path where it passes under and near the tree. Having seen and read about a steel protection frame around a signature tree in Danville, I contacted the Town of Danville, and spoke with Development Services Director Steve Lake.

He explained that their signature (town logo) tree was preserved, using a heavy steel frame around but not touching the trunk. The frame was installed to protect the main thoroughfare, with the understanding that if the tree ever began to lean enough to touch the frame, the tree should be removed. (Coincidentally, he told me that the tree has just recently begun to lean enough to touch the frame.)

Steve explained that a local engineer reluctantly agreed to design the frame, after three arborists recommended removal of the tree and one recommended the frame. A general contractor was hired to build it. The cost of the project was about \$70,000 plus the arborist's fees.

Steve sent me photos, some of which I am forwarding to you. He also mentioned the names of the engineer and arborists who were involved in the project.



