City of Urbana, Illinois

Special Meeting of the Urbana Tree Commission Meeting
Urbana City Council Chambers
400 S. Vine St.
Urbana, IL 61801

Thursday, January 16, 2014
7:00 P.M.

Members Present: Carol Augspurger, Stewart Berlocher, Jeff Dawson, Thom Fehrmann, Michael Stevenson

Members Absent: Barbara Anderson, Darin Eastburn, Derek Liebert

Staff Present: Michael Brunk, City of Urbana Arborist

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m.

Roll Call

Roll call was taken. A quorum was present.

Public Input

Stephen Wald, Urbana resident, addressed the Commission to express his desire to delay removal of the hackberry tree at 312 S. Coler Avenue. He expressed desire to designate the hackberry tree as the City's first Legacy Tree. He also expressed opposition to the requirement that a tree be in good health to be designated a Legacy Tree.

John White, Urbana resident, addressed the Commission to express his desire to preserve the hackberry tree at 312 S. Coler Avenue and to designate it as a Legacy Tree. He also expressed opposition to the requirement that a tree must be in good health to be designated a Legacy Tree.

Eric Sacks, Urbana resident, addressed the Commission in favor of preserving the hackberry tree at 312 S. Coler Avenue.

Dennis Roberts, Urbana City Alderman for Ward 5, addressed the Commission to express his desire to preserve the hackberry tree at 312 S. Coler Avenue. He also spoke in favor of designating the tree as a Legacy Tree.

Gary Stensland, Urbana resident, addressed the Commission in favor of preserving the hackberry tree at 312 S. Coler Avenue, and expressed his desire to see it designated as a Legacy Tree.

Ilona Matkovszki, Urbana resident, addressed the Commission in favor of preserving the hackberry tree at 312 S. Coler Avenue.

Chris Stohr, Urbana resident, addressed the Commission in favor of preserving the hackberry tree at 312 S. Coler Avenue.

Jesse Wald, Urbana resident, addressed the Commission in favor of preserving the hackberry tree at 312 S. Coler Avenue.

Brian Adams, Urbana resident, addressed the Commission to express that he was in favor of preserving the hackberry tree at 312 S. Coler Avenue.

David Monk, Champaign resident, commended the Commission for allowing an opportunity for public discourse on the hackberry tree at 312 S. Coler Avenue.

Eric Jakobsson, Urbana City Alderman for Ward 2, addressed the Commission to express that he was in favor of removing the hackberry tree at 312 S. Coler Avenue if it posed a risk to public safety.

Robin Arbiter, Urbana resident, was not present, but submitted the following communication to be read into the record:

"I support the preservation of the giant Hackberry tree at the corner of High Street and Coler in Urbana and hope that a safe and feasible way will be found to keep it a living presence in the city until such a time as it poses an unfixable public safety hazard.

We humans are surrounded by animals and plants that sustain us, yet we tend to view them as giving their lives to us, when in fact they have their own lives and destinies and do not so much give as give way to our taking.

A tree that dates to the middle of the nineteenth century bears witness to two centuries of rain, drought, and other conditions in Urbana. It is a storyteller with a unique picture of Urbana life recorded among its rings. Is it ready to stop telling its story? Are we ready to interrupt it if it is not?

A tree that dates to the middle of the nineteenth century has been a home or highway to forty generations of squirrels and other tree-dwelling or tree-travelling quadrupeds. Forty generations of birds have built nests and raised families in its branches and have eaten its ripened fruit. Fledglings have learn to fly and hawks and owls have hunted in its shadows, while possums and raccoons have rested in its arms. Is its capacity for providing home, shelter, passage, and food at an end? Can we aid it so it may serve a few more generations?

We will say goodbye to this tree one day; it will come down, and when it does, the creatures it shelters, the birds who return to it year after year, will feel the way we do when a landmark that anchors us disappears. They will adapt because they must. But we, to whom the tree provides one of the greatest gifts of all – oxygen – should, I think, be compassionate and

appreciative of this tree until its end. Is this its end? Or can we, with our resources, conserve and preserve it for another human generation?

I hope that these considerations will be added to the substantial professional wisdom that the Public Works staff brings to the decision about the tree."

A Champaign resident who did not state her name addressed the Commission to express her appreciation of Urbana residents' efforts to preserve the hackberry tree at 312 S. Coler Avenue.

David Monk addressed the Commission a second time to note that he felt there would be economic support from the public to fund efforts to preserve the tree.

Presentation: Hackberry Tree at 312 S. Coler Avenue

Michael Brunk gave a presentation (attached) on the history, current state of health, and scenarios for partial removal of the hackberry tree at 312 S. Coler Avenue. Brunk reported that, due to the unsafe condition of the canopy, he recommended removal.

Dawson read highlights from a risk assessment (attached) written by Dr. Richard Hauer, professor of Urban Forestry at University of Wisconsin – Stevens Point, who gave the tree a risk rating of 9 or 10, with 10 representing the highest possible hazard.

Brunk listed several options for memorializing the tree should it be removed. Dawson reported that he had been successful in reserving greenhouse space should propagation take place. He also noted that the tree might receive an honorary designation as the City's first Legacy Tree.

Dawson and Brunk answered questions and heard further comments from members of the public about the presentation and the tree's possible removal and memorialization.

Removal of Hackberry Tree at 312 S. Coler Avenue

After some discussion, the Commission voted on the removal of the hackberry tree at 312 S. Coler Avenue. Dawson clarified that passage of the proposal to remove the tree signified that, at minimum, the canopy would be removed; non-passage meant that none of the tree would be removed. Vote was taken by roll call. The results were as follows:

Augspurger – yes
Berlocher - yes
Dawson – yes
Fehrmann – yes
Stevenson - yes

Adjournment

There being no further business to discuss, this meeting adjourned at 9:10 p.m.

Femi Fletcher, Recording Secretary
Tree Commission

312 S Coler Hackberry Reasons for Complete Removal

Dear Tree Commission
This is a draft of the presentation I will be giving at the Tree Commission meeting on Jan 16th. I am still working on it but this information should provide you the gist of my concerns and reasoning for removal.

Tree as seen by most as having a healthy appearance

Tree damage and decay as seen from house side of tree

Tree decay as seen from 40 feet

Tree decay in major limb attachments as seen from 40 feet

1. Major rot and limb failure in center crotch area

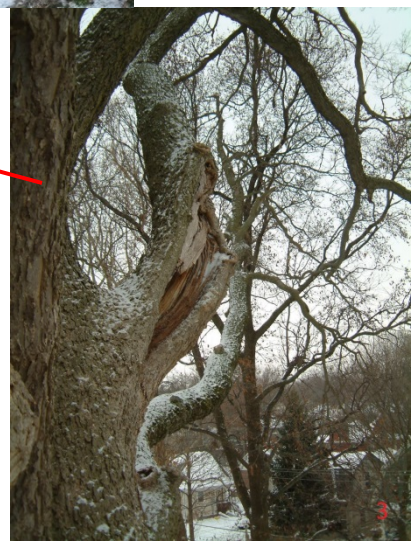
Upon inspection on January 9th 2014 after recent blizzard / wind storm this failure in a large 18”+ diameter branch off the center leader was discovered. This limb is a component of the cabling support system and this damage is approximately 40 feet above ground.

2. Visually evident rot and hollows throughout entire limb over house

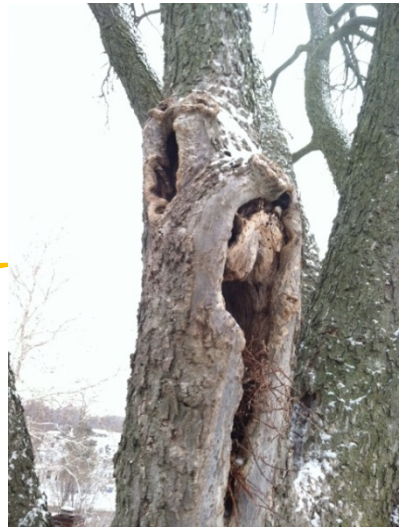
3. Visibly evident decay in critical branch connection areas.

This decay area is in a major branch junction at 40 feet

This wound can be seen from ground on North side of tree



Measured hollows show 1.5” and 2” of sound wood in 18” diameter limbs



Decay is visibly evident in tree’s main crotch and trunk

CYBER PRUNING ILLUSTRATION

In this illustration I conservatively removed (cyber pruned) a percentage of the worst hazards following acceptable arboricultural practices. However the remaining center leader's attachment and lateral over the street are compromised by decay (open hollows) and the remaining structure of the tree is questionable as there are signs of rot in the main crotch and trunk.

The loss of foliage will hasten decline and may be insufficient to draw nutrients to furthest limbs causing dieback.

I believe it would be too risky to leave the tree standing without regular surveillance.

This would be the more likely appearance of the Hackberry tree after all hazards have been removed.

- Leaving the tree in this state would first require the trunk wood to be in a sound condition. This can be partially determined at the remaining branch attachment once the tree is cut back to this point.

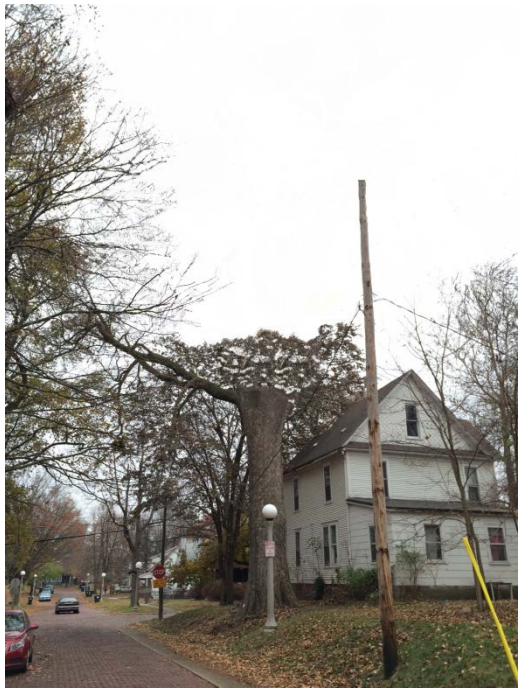
- I would also recommend a thorough inspection of the entire trunk to ensure its structural integrity.

If the wood appeared to be sound at the remaining branch attachment Scientific analysis such as with a ***tomograph*** could be utilized for an interior inspection of the lower portions of the trunk.

Reasons Not to Leave Portion of Tree

- Promotes Bad Arboriculture
  - To residents
  - To other communities
  - May be seen as an way to prune large trees over homes
- Appearance of Disrepair
- Disrespectful end for any tree let alone a Matriarch of the community
- Costs for removal increases as it would be in two phases
- Requires regular aerial inspections to capture any impending failures
- Draws public to a potential risk area

City Arborist recommends immediate removal.



Likely appearance of tree after hazard abatement. This would require trunk decay to be studied in more detail.

Hackberry current appearance

Leaving compromised branches without any means of additional support is not recommended

College of Natural Resources
University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point
Stevens Point, Wisconsin 54481-3897 (715) 346-3642 FAX (715) 346-3624

January 16, 2014

Dept. of Natural Resources and Environmental Sciences
1316 Plant Sciences Laboratory
1201 South Dorner Dr.
University of Illinois
Urbana, IL 61801
217-333-9281
jdawson2@illinois.edu

Re. Hackberry Tree Observations

Dear Jeff:

This letter is a follow-up to your request for me to describe my observation of the hackberry tree in Urbana scheduled for removal due to the potential risk for failure. From an urban forest management perspective, all people involved are commended for the process that is occurring. I teach my urban forest management students that a policy and process should be developed to determine the risk of trees for failure, the community should be part of the process with urban forestry decisions of an important manor (such as with removing trees that carry community significance), and a tree board or commission should be used to provide recommendations to a municipal urban forestry program. Urbana has a long history of a tree commission and this case fits well with obtaining community input that along with expert opinion can be used to make an informed decision.

The hackberry tree has an emotional attachment due to its large size. As an observer, it is hard not to have that as an important sense. As an observer, that part is put to the side. The tree has a history of branch failure and support systems (cables) installed to support lead branches. From the ground I noted these observations:

- Several large branch wounds from past branch failure. These occurred (I was told) during the 1990 ice storm and during other occasional branch failures.
- Adaptive growth by the tree at some wounds locations. Adaptive growth occurs by trees in response to a sensed loss of a strength (often decay) and occurs through annual additions of wood growth.
- Cavities along main branch leads apparently at the location of a side branch that had died and later decayed away.
- Several cables installed to guy main branch leads together to stabilize the canopy.
- The tree overhangs a rental house and a secondary street.

From images I later observed, these provided additional observations from the canopy perspective:

- Decay is apparent at the location where main branch leads connect to the trunk. Decay at this location is an important concern as loading from the canopy occurs at this location.
- Horizontal cracking was noted on a main lead. Horizontal cracking is a significant defect and an indication that failure is occurring. During tree risk training sessions we are not always able to find good examples to train with as horizontal cracks are indicative of the part failing analogous to a tree in the initial part of breaking during felling.
- Multiple vertical cracks associated with past branch wounds.

From my initial ground only observation, if I was asked to rate the tree from a level of risk, I would put it in a moderate to moderate approaching high level of risk. Based on the additional photographic evidence, I would qualitatively place the hackberry in a high category for risk. Using a system to rate risk that I was part of the development team with the USDA-Forest Service, I developed a numerical risk rating that uses a scale of 3 to 10 with the possibility of 11 or 12 possible based on additional factors. The system has three main parts:

Probability of Failure (1 to 4 points; 1=low, 2=medium, 3=high, 4=extremely high)
+
Size of Part(s) (1 to 3 points; 1=<4", 2=2 to 20", 3=>20")
+
Probability of Target (1 to 3 points; 1=occasional use, 2=intermittent use, 3=frequent use)
+
Other Risk Factors (0 to 2 points; professional judgment based factors, species + site specific)
=
Risk Rating (3 to 10 points, 11 to 12 possible)

Using this system, my observation is the tree would rank in a 9 to 10 category. This was based on probability of failure (3 to 4) + Size of Part(s) (3) + Probability of Target (3), = Risk Rating (9 to 10). When a tree is placed in a low, moderate, or high category, it does not mean that risk for failure will not occur in low or is imminent in a high. A high risk rating says we have significant concern that based on the defects, size of parts, and likelihood of people or property in that location at a time of failure, the potential exists for a tragic outcome. The risk of rating can be decreased by reducing the probability of failure by removing the defect or stabilizing the defect such has been done. The support systems have likely increased the life span of the tree. Decay in the main lead and branch juncture is a major concern that needs addressing as I see this as a significant part with discussions on how to proceed with the tree. In addition, the horizontal cracking is a concern to address. Another way to reduce the risk rating is to keep people away. This involves blocking the site from entry or warning people of the risk. Both of these are social decisions for a community to decide. It is up to a community to decide what level of risk there are willing to accept.

It was nice to catch up with current events and to work on the sugar maple manuscript. When I traveled to Urbana to work on that paper and my other meeting with staff from the International Society of Arboriculture, little did I know I would have the opportunity to observe this tree and provide my observations. Feel free to contact me with any further questions.

Sincerely,

Richard J. Hauer

Richard J. Hauer
Coordinator of the Forestry Discipline
Associate Professor of Urban Forestry
College of Natural Resources
University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point