



CITY OF SANTA BARBARA
PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION REPORT

AGENDA DATE: November 20, 2013

TO: Parks and Recreation Commission

FROM: Parks Division, Parks and Recreation Department

SUBJECT: Recognition of Bartlett Tree Care Experts for Donation of \$1,000 in Services for the Historic Moreton Bay Fig Tree

RECOMMENDATION: That the Commission recognize Bartlett Tree Care Experts for their donation of \$1,000 in services to treat the historic Moreton Bay Fig Tree.

DISCUSSION:

Background

The historic Moreton Bay Fig Tree is located at the corner of Montecito Street and Chapala Street in Moreton Bay Fig Tree Park. It was planted in its current location in 1877. This tree was designated an historic tree by City Council in 1970. Until October 2013, this tree was recognized as the co-champion largest *Ficus macrophylla*, Moreton Bay Fig tree along with one in Balboa Park in San Diego in the California Big Tree Registry. The two were designated as the largest of this species in California until another tree located in Big Tree Park in Glendora California was recently measured.

Due to the construction of the US 101 freeway through this section of Santa Barbara, both Chapala Street and Montecito Street were constructed adjacent to this tree. A sub-surface irrigation system was installed under the roadways to help provide water to the tree. Because of the location of these roads, nearly half of the roots of the tree are inaccessible. This construction and change to the rooting environment may have contributed to the current condition of the tree.

Moreton Bay Fig Tree Treatment

In February 2006, the Moreton Bay Fig Tree was diagnosed with Phytophthora Root Rot, a soil born disease, by an independent Arborist who was hired to confirm diagnosis of the disease and recommend actions to help the tree's health. Even though it was diagnosed in 2006, the disease is evident in a photograph of the tree from 1976. The disease is most evident in the top and north-east quadrant of the tree.

Phytophthora Root Rot kills the fine root tips that absorb water and nutrients for the tree. The disease thrives in wet soils, creates smaller and thinner foliage, dieback of branches, and eventual tree mortality. The disease, if left unchecked, eventually kills trees by suffocating and starving them. Approved treatments have only been able to suppress the disease.

In 2006, the Independent Arborist recommended three actions to improve the health of the tree. These included three fungicide treatment sessions, increasing the tree protection zone, and water management. Two of the three fungicide applications were made and staff monitored the moisture levels of the tree to determine when to water the tree. These methods to battle the disease had less than adequate results. The tree has steadily declined since 2006.

The use of approved fungicides is a common approach to treat this disease and success rates vary. More recently, a combination of two different fungicides applied in combination have demonstrated greater success and may succeed in eliminating the disease from the soil. Although not proven through research and therefore experimental, in 2012, Bartlett Tree Care Experts approached the Department with a proposal to treat the tree utilizing these two fungicides in combination. After re-confirmation of the presence of Phytophthora, staff secured an exemption from the IPM Advisory Committee and the project began in January 2013. The fungicide treatments were scheduled for February, May, and August 2013.

Bartlett Tree Care Experts provided the three treatments of the disease through soil injection of two fungicides (Mefenoxam and Agri-Fos), and a nutrient based fertilizer called Promot MZM. The total cost of treatment was \$1,950.00. Of that amount, Bartlett Tree Care Experts contributed \$1,000 in free services toward treatment of this disease.

A recent inspection of the tree shows promising results. New leaves have emerged and they appear to be larger than the older leaves remaining on the tree. Staff will monitor the tree's health and is hopeful that the spring brings sufficient new growth to confirm that the treatment was successful.

It is with tremendous gratitude that the Parks and Recreation Department recognizes the contribution provided by the Bartlett Tree Care Experts.

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