

Franceschi Flame Tree Treatment and Propagation Plan – September 2013

Background

Location: City Parking Lot 12

Estimated age and height: 118 years and 45-50 feet. It is believed to have been planted some time after Dr. Francesco Franceschi established a nursery along lower State Street in 1895.

Historic Designation: October 1, 2002

Current Condition

The Franceschi Flame Tree leans toward the parking spaces at about 15 degrees off center. The tree suffers from a white rot decay of the trunk that cannot be treated. This decay has been present since the tree was designated a historic tree in 2002. The lowering of State Street as well as construction of the parking lot around 1991 is likely to have impacted the root system. City management of the tree has been geared toward minimizing the potential for the fungus to spread through limited pruning and removal of dead wood. Despite these efforts, the trunk has now decayed to the point where the tree is standing on four stilts because the interconnecting tissues have rotted away. The wood of flame trees is generally considered heavy due to the high water content. In addition, the upper branches are intact and therefore heavy. The weight of the branches coupled with the rot, the lean, and the decay at the base, places the tree in a high risk of falling over. In most cases this level of risk would dictate removal altogether.

Treatment and Propagation Plan

Because of the importance of this tree, we have developed a plan to significantly reduce the risk, while attempting to preserve the tree in place for as long as possible. We have also developed a replacement plan, because at some point the tree will no longer be viable and will need to be removed. This plan was developed with the City's Risk Management Office and Public Works Downtown Parking Program, as well as noted local horticulturalist Bruce Van Dyke and Randy Baldwin of San Marcos Growers.

The plan includes the following steps:

1. Reduce the tree to about 12 - 15 feet tall with the intent of promoting new vegetative growth that can be trained into a new, smaller, tree.
2. Collect viable branchlets for propagation by Bruce Van Dyke and Randy Baldwin
 - Bruce Van Dyke will graft some of the branchlets to 5-gallon flame trees the Department purchased from West Covina Nursery. Mr. Van Dyke is known for his talents in grafting plant material to root stock.
 - Randy Baldwin will grow the remaining cuttings vegetatively. Mr. Baldwin has successfully achieved this with the Sexton Flame Tree.
3. Monitor the condition of the Franceschi Flame Tree. If the condition worsens, it may need to be removed.
4. If the propagation is successful, and the new trees have sufficiently grown large enough, at least one will be planted in a parking lot planter where space is currently available. When safety hazards dictate that the Franceschi Flame Tree must be removed, one will be planted in that location.

By implementation of this plan, we may preserve the Franceschi Flame Tree for the short-term while propagating genetically identical specimens and planning for its eventual replacement