

Testimony to the Ashland, Oregon TREE COMMISSION from Julie Norman Feb 7, 2019

I want to thank the Tree Commissioners for your unanimous vote at the Special Meeting about the Japanese Garden on January 14, 2019, when you recommended that Ashland Parks Commissioners preserve the two legacy Douglas fir trees that were being considered for logging, in order expand the Japanese Garden and plant a bamboo patch.

Unfortunately, on Jan. 28th, Parks Commissioners voted 3 to 2 to log the trees, claiming they are exempt from your review process. I am sad that you were ignored. Three of the five Parks Commissioners didn't see a need to follow the Tree Commission's sensible environmental review process, given that the Ashland Municipal Code grants them an exemption (see below).

I was told that the exemption language was reworded late in the process in 2000, in order to expedite tree removals by the Parks staff, since they have so much tree work to do. They didn't want to take the time to repeatedly go through your review process in a year. So the requirement for Parks was reduced to providing "an annual plan in January." (see below)

SUGGESTIONS:

(a) I propose that this AMC exemption language be revisited and revised by the Tree Commission, so that trees meeting a certain criteria (diameter?) on park lands are not exempted from the tree removal permit process.

(b) I propose that the Tree Commission alert the City Council in your March 19 City Council Update, that you are working on a revision to this exemption language and open it up for feedback from the Council and the public.

Thank you,

Julie Norman  541-488-9474

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AMC 18.5.7.020 Applicability and Review Procedure

C. Exempt from Tree Removal Permit. The following activities are exempt from the requirement for a tree removal permit in subsections 18.5.7.020.A and B, above:

1. Those activities associated with the establishment or alteration of any public park under the Ashland Parks and Recreation Commission. However, the Parks and Recreation Department shall provide an annual plan in January to the Tree Commission outlining proposed tree removal and topping activities, and reporting on tree removal and topping activities that were carried out in the previous year.

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**EXCERPT OF MINUTES from Ashland Parks Commission and Tree Commission
Special Meeting Jan. 14, 2019, re: Japanese Style Garden Renovation in Lithia Park**

"In attendance:

Tree Commissioners: (Chair) Chris John, Eric Simpson, Asa Cates, (not formally sworn in yet), and Cat Gould

City of Ashland Planning Liaison Derek Severson and Council Liaison Stephen Jensen"

"...[The] public portion of the meeting concluded, and the Tree Commission deliberated amongst themselves for a few minutes and then re-opened the floor to public comments. The Tree Commission heard many comments both for and against removal of the large Doug Firs. Chris John made a motion that the Tree Commission formally recommend to the APRC Commission to preserve the two large Douglas Fir trees and explore different alternatives including a redesign of the Wall or location. He also recommended APRC adequately protect all of the other trees that are to be retained. Eric Simpson seconded the motion, and the motion was passed unanimously.

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Japanese Garden Project Notice of Suspension:

Thursday, Jan. 31 Press Release from Parks Director Michael Black:

"The plan for renovating the Japanese Garden in Lithia Park has been suspended, at least for the time being. The prospective donor for the project has concluded it should be deferred and reconsidered. The donor's concern is that a project, which proponents had envisioned as a contribution to community harmony and enduring cultural value, has become a source of genuine community dissension.

The Ashland Parks and Recreation Commission, in a split vote, had decided at its regular meeting last Monday, January 28, 2019, to move forward with the Japanese Garden plans, as proposed by landscape designer, Toru Tanaka. The most controversial aspect of the proposed design involved removal of two existing Douglas Fir trees.

APRC Director, Michael A. Black, announced today the project will not proceed this year and its future is under review."