



STAFF REPORT ACTION REQUIRED

Utilization Plans for the Maple Leaf Forever Tree

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| Date: | September 9, 2013 |
| To: | Executive Committee |
| From: | Michael H. Williams, General Manager, Economic Development & Culture |
| Wards: | All |
| Reference Number: | |

SUMMARY

The silver maple tree at 62 Laing Street, believed to be the inspiration for Alexander Muir's *Maple Leaf Forever* song written in 1867, was felled by a storm on July 19, 2013.

The tree is owned by the City of Toronto and was situated on the historic site of the Maple Cottage operated by Parks, Forestry and Recreation in Ward 32 in the Leslieville neighbourhood.

The tree's demise generated significant national media and public attention. The City has received numerous enquiries on the future use of the salvaged wood, including proposals from major Canadian heritage and cultural organizations.

Due to the historic and cultural significance of this iconic tree, and the continued national interest on its fate, efforts should be made to utilize the tree remnants for the public good.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The General Manager of Economic Development and Culture recommends that City Council:

1. Authorize the General Manager of Economic Development and Culture (EDC) to work with Parks, Forestry and Recreation (PFR), Heritage Preservation Services, and the City Manager to proceed with the utilization plan for the salvaged wood, using the criteria outlined in item 3a of this report's Comments section and to report back on the allocation and use of the salvaged wood.

2. Authorize the General Manager of Economic Development and Culture to develop a business case for a Maple Leaf Forever National Art Competition at a cost of \$150,000 as outlined in item 3b of this report's Comments section, to be included for consideration as part of the 2014 budget process.
3. Direct the General Manager of Parks, Forestry and Recreation to work with Heritage Preservation Services to determine the future of the remaining part of the tree on the designated heritage property at 62 Laing Street.

Financial Impact

There are no financial impacts for Recommendations 1 and 3 beyond what has already been approved in the 2013 budget.

The financial impact of Recommendation 2 will be submitted as part of a comprehensive business case being prepared by the General Manager of Economic Development and Culture for consideration through the 2014 budget process. The business case will identify costs and sources of funds of the Maple Leaf Forever National Art Competition. The estimated cost to conduct the art competition is \$150,000.

The Deputy City Manager and Chief Financial Officer has reviewed this report and agree with the financial impact information.

DECISION HISTORY

In 1992, the City of Toronto designated the property at 62 Laing Street under Part IV of the *Ontario Heritage Act* for historical and architectural reasons, including the building on the site, the "Maple Cottage," and the property as the site of the *Maple Leaf Forever* tree. The City has also preserved the legacy of this site and Alexander Muir by creating and maintaining the Maple Leaf Forever Park around the Maple Cottage.

ISSUE BACKGROUND

Historical Significance

The silver maple tree at 62 Laing Street is believed to be the inspiration for the song *The Maple Leaf Forever*, written by Alexander Muir in 1867. Muir and his friend George Leslie, for whom Leslieville was named, frequently walked in the area, and the legend is that on one of these walks, a leaf fell from the silver maple and inspired Muir to write the song. *The Maple Leaf Forever*, together with the maple leaf it evokes, has since become a powerful symbol for Canadians.

The Storm of July 19th, 2013

On July 19th a severe weather event, which included very high wind speeds, resulted in more than 1,400 Service Requests being generated to Urban Forestry related to tree failures including Maple Leaf Forever tree. The majority of the tree's crown fell onto the adjacent road and sidewalk.

While clearing the fallen tree to restore service to the street, Urban Forestry staff recognized the significance of this tree and the potential of re-purposing of the wood. They retained the majority of the large wood pieces and this salvaged wood has been stored in an Urban Forestry building. The stem of the tree was left standing. Following further evaluation it was determined that portions of the stem were rotting. On August 28 Urban Forestry removed a portion of that stem to prevent a further collapse of what remained. The current stem stands approximately 4 metres in height.

COMMENTS

The fallen tree attracted national attention, and generated public and stakeholder interest that the wood be re-purposed in a way that commemorates the tree's cultural significance. Given the focus on the tree's value as a cultural asset, PFR asked EDC to manage the process of determining how the remains of the tree should be used, with support from Urban Forestry and Heritage Preservation Services.

1. Salvaged Wood and Preservation Efforts

Urban Forestry staff salvaged 48 logs from the Maple Leaf Forever tree. These varied in size from a 4" x 35" branch to a 41" x 12 ft trunk piece and varied in quality from solid to wood that is severely decayed.

Staff consulted with the wood industry experts including staff from a local sawmill, wood craftspeople and the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources to ensure that the salvaged wood is preserved until its utilization plan is approved by City Council. Wood, when cut and before it is processed, does degrade approximately 5% per month despite best preservation efforts.

All salvaged wood has been retained and preserved. Even severely decayed wood may have significant value in creating art pieces and the smallest pieces of solid wood can be used for a variety of applications such as pen casings and flag holders.

2. Requests for Wood from the Maple Leaf Forever Tree

EDC has received approximately 200 enquiries and requests for a piece of the Maple Leaf Forever Tree. EDC has been approached by numerous local wood crafts people who have offered to work with the City to create valuable heirloom pieces to commemorate the heritage and cultural value of the living tree.

EDC staff has reached out into the local Leslieville community regarding the community's desires on potential uses for the wood. City staff and related agencies have been asked for their suggestions on possible uses both in the Toronto community and in City government. EDC staff have also been in contact with provincial and national government officials to ascertain their interest and possible uses.

3. Plan for Utilization

a. Utilization of the Salvaged Wood

In keeping with the heritage and cultural significance of the Maple Leaf Forever tree, the following criteria are recommended to evaluate uses for the salvaged wood:

- Items created from the wood will be kept in the public realm to the greatest extent possible except where there may be unique opportunities for public benefit such as creation of awards for civic duty or articles that can be sold to support Toronto urban tree forestry initiatives. No more than 5% of the wood would be used for these type of proposals.
- Proposals for the use of the wood will be prioritized based on the following categories:
 - Uses within the Leslieville community (i.e. at local schools or libraries);
 - Proposals that have a national or provincial significance (i.e. the Pan-Am Games or museums);
 - For applications which have a provincial significance (i.e. display at Queens Park) or from provincial cultural and historical institutions;
 - For applications by Toronto cultural and historical institutions (i.e. Toronto Public Libraries);
 - For applications for use inside the City government (i.e. Council Speaker gavels).

There are currently over 50 requests for appropriate applications which meet the above criteria. EDC is confident that there is adequate wood to fulfill all current requests plus additional future requests that meet the above criteria.

b. Utilization of the Remaining Upper Stem

Urban Forestry staff evaluated the condition of the tree stem and they estimated that the stump is hollow – ranging from an approximate 85% cavity at the top (approximately at 10 ft height) to an approximate 40% cavity at ground level. EDC engaged a tree preservation specialist who confirmed Urban Forestry's initial evaluation.

EDC staff, with the agreement of PFR, propose that the tree stem be cut with a minimum of 2 feet remaining in the ground and that the removed stem and some of the salvaged wood which has unique artistic features be used in the commissioning of a public art work to reside at the site of the original tree or where best to protect the wood-based art piece from environmental and other conditions.

The public art work would be commissioned through a two-stage open national competition. The completed work would enter the Public Art and Monuments Collection of the City of Toronto upon installation.

There are a number of possible options for the remaining part of the tree trunk. Parks Forestry and Recreation who manage the site will work with Heritage Preservation Services and arborist experts to determine the most appropriate course of action for the remaining parts of the tree.

The duration of a public art competition is approximately six months. Competitions are adjudicated by a qualified independent selection panel with professional expertise in contemporary art and knowledge of the local context.

Due to the timing of this competition, funding is not available in the 2013 Culture budget. Once the amount of usable tree stem is confirmed, City staff, subject to approval in the 2014 Budget will develop and implement a Maple Leaf Forever National Art Competition at a cost of \$150,000.

4. Preservation of the Heritage Value at 62 Laing Street

The Maple Leaf Forever Tree is an important part of the heritage value of the designated property. Heritage Preservation Services will evaluate the extent to which proposed preservation efforts will conserve the heritage value of the site, and will report to the Toronto Preservation Board and City Council if required.

5. Using this Iconic Tree to Build Awareness of Toronto's Urban Wood Industry

Using the salvaged wood of this downed iconic silver maple by the City represents an opportunity to show both local and national leadership. By demonstrating the opportunities for using Toronto's urban wood resource with this tree, Toronto homeowners who similarly face the loss of a tree, will be made aware of the ways they too can preserve some element of their tree as a family heirloom while working with Toronto wood working industry.

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SIGNATURE

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