

2003 SEPTEMBER 10

**TO:** CITY MANAGER

**FROM:** DIRECTOR PARKS, RECREATION AND CULTURAL SERVICES

**SUBJECT: COTTONWOOD TREES ALONG THE URBAN TRAIL BEHIND 1165 RIDLEY DRIVE**

**PURPOSE:** To provide Council with information regarding the cottonwood trees along the urban trail behind 1165 Ridley Drive

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**RECOMMENDATION**

1. THAT a copy of this report be sent to Mr. and Mrs. Domae, Mike Usinger and Elio Ferrari for information.

**REPORT**

**INTRODUCTION**

At its meeting of 2003 July 21 Council heard a delegation from Mr. Don Domae requesting assistance to eliminate the white fluff that is dispersed onto their property by nearby Cottonwood trees. Staff have reviewed the information and provide the following report as information.

**BACKGROUND**

Cottonwood trees are a native pioneer species on the west coast establishing themselves in natural woodland and park areas throughout the City. The trees in question are most likely native species that have established themselves and have been accepted as a part of the landscape over the last 50 years. It is common place to find Cottonwood trees throughout City parks, woodlands and open space areas.

Like any species, the Cottonwood has peculiarities which in this case includes the cotton seed which disperses each spring in May and June. The fluff causes an aesthetic nuisance and has been targeted as the cause of allergies by many people. The Simon Fraser Health Authority confirm that the fluff is actually a seed dispersed by the female trees and it is not a pollen. Pollen is released by many other plants such as alder, ornamental grasses and common Bermuda bluegrass at the same time as the seeds of the cottonwood tree are released.

It is a common misconception that it is the cottonwood seeds causing the allergy problems. The fluff is however a nuisance problem that covers the ground. It also travels great distances which means the three trees behind 1165 Ridley are not the sole source of the problem raised by Mr. Domae. All of the cottonwood in the area which may range in the number of 25-30 contribute to the nuisance.

### **TREE HEALTH**

The Forestry section has addressed the complainant on at least two previous occasions. In response, trees in the vicinity were inspected. Although staff have found signs of sabotage on many of the trees in the area, the three cottonwood behind 1165 Ridley were found in good health. The trees have been climbed, inspected, the quality of limb attachment of tree branches was inspected and all dead wood has been removed. Roots have been pruned and an 18 inch deeproot barrier was installed (in last 18 months) to prevent incursion onto private property. From a safety and tree health perspective, the cottonwoods behind 1165 Ridley are fine specimens.

The City Tree Management Policy focuses on conservation of healthy trees. Section 3.0 of the Policy does permit removal of trees under special circumstances as outlined in Section 3.1. however, seed and leaf litter is not a viable reason for removal. The tree protection policy has been forwarded to Mr. Domae.

### **SUMMARY**

The Cottonwood trees along this stretch of the Urban Trail create the park quality and natural experience. The trees are approximately 50 years old providing habitat for wildlife and a mature shade cover for trail users. Removal of these large trees would have an indelible impact on the site and would not solve the fluff problem unless the entire Cottonwood stock in the area was removed. The precedent for tree removal based on fluff or leaf litter would be wide ranging. It is recommended to retain the trees through their natural life or until they warrant removal due to safety or hazard potential.



KATE FRIARS  
Director Parks, Recreation & Cultural Services

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