



MEMORANDUM

DATE: April 9, 2024
TO: Urban Forestry Commission
FROM: Nick Redmond, Urban Forestry Specialist
RE: **Heritage Tree Criteria Review Findings**
CC:

The Heritage Tree Program plays a vital role in recognizing and preserving significant trees within our community. It serves as a means for individuals to protect trees on private property where a tree removal permit is not applicable. Heritage Trees are protected from unnecessary removal and aggressive maintenance actions. This program serves as a positive tool for community engagement and is an initial outreach effort to raise public awareness about the importance of trees. It provides a means for the community to engage in the preservation of significant trees or trees that individuals deem important, whether or not they are protected by code.

In collaboration with Heather Day-Melgar, an Urban Forestry AmeriCorps member, we conducted a comprehensive review of Heritage Tree Programs from 19 different communities and referenced an article published in the Arboricultural Journal titled "Establishing Consensus Criteria for Determining Heritage Tree Status." These documents are attached for your reference.

After evaluating these documents, my professional opinion is that no changes are needed at this time to Vancouver's Heritage Tree Criteria.

The 16 consensus heritage tree core criteria identified in Table 3 of the article can be condensed into four main themes:

- 1) Historical value
- 2) Cultural value
- 3) Location value
- 4) Species-specific value

Vancouver's existing Heritage Tree Criteria effectively addresses all four of these criteria:

- *The tree has a diameter (at breast height) of 36 inches or greater; addressing Species-specific value*
- *The tree has a distinctive size, shape, or location, or is of a distinctive species or age which warrants a Heritage Tree status; addressing Species-specific value, Cultural value, and Location value*
- *The tree possesses exceptional beauty which warrants a Heritage Tree status; addressing Cultural value and Species-specific value*
- *The tree is distinctive due to a functional or aesthetic relationship to a natural resource, such as trees located along stream banks or trees located along ridge lines; addressing Cultural value and Location value*
- *The tree has a documented association with a historical figure, property, or significant historical event. addressing Historical value and Cultural value*

Vancouver's criteria encompass these four main themes and are sufficiently broad to allow for some interpretation. It is not practical to eliminate all subjectivity from the criteria. Some subjectivity can be beneficial, as the appointed commissioners who vote to designate a tree as a heritage tree typically have an interest in trees and are not necessarily tree experts. Over the last 20 years, I have observed varying degrees of scrutiny among different commissions with the same criteria, with some commissions denying a heritage tree application in one round only to approve it in the next round.

I do not recommend limiting potential heritage trees. Today's trees are tomorrow's heritage trees, and by further restricting heritage tree designations, we may be limiting the options for future commissions. The broad criteria of the Heritage Tree designation allows past and future commissions to apply their own values in reviewing new applications and protecting trees not governed by code.

In conclusion, it is my professional opinion that no changes are needed at this time, as our criteria already encompass all of the 16 core criteria identified. If, in future rounds of heritage trees, we identify a missing or beneficial criteria, we can revise the criteria accordingly. The Heritage Tree Program has been successfully preserving trees for over 25 years, and making changes without identifying consistent ongoing issues seems premature. I have also drafted the summaries for the majority of the heritage trees in the inventory and regularly update the inventory with newly designated trees. Having been involved with the Heritage Tree Program for as long as I have been with the City, it is clear that the program is effective in preserving trees that would likely have been removed otherwise.