



Greenspace Alliance of Canada's Capital

Alliance pour les espaces verts de la capitale du Canada

PRESS RELEASE

Renovation of Centre Block threatens historic elm tree on Parliament Hill

Greenspace Alliance wants government to preserve it as a heritage tree

OTTAWA February 4, 2019 — The Greenspace Alliance of Canada's Capital is urging the federal government to assure the public that it intends to preserve a heritage elm tree threatened by renovations to Centre Block.

The white elm (*ulmus americana*) is a prominent landmark on an otherwise denuded Parliament Hill. It sits across a roadway just east of the Centre Block, shading a statue of Sir John A. Macdonald.

"We understand that this historic elm tree is slated for destruction as part of the renovation that's occurring at Centre Block," said Paul Johanis, chair of the GA. He wrote to the current chair of the NCC (and his successor, Tobi Nussbaum) on January 7, 2019 and followed up with another letter to NCC staff on January 22, 2019. A reply to that letter indicated that the NCC and the Federal Heritage Building Review Office (FHBRO) are currently reviewing a Public Services and Procurement Canada (PSPC) proposal regarding a tree and monument relocation strategy for the Centre Block renovation. The tree's fate depends on the result of this review.

Save the tree from bureaucratic table tennis

"It's important that the government take steps not only to save this beautiful elm tree but to do what's right and have it listed as a heritage tree," Johanis said.

"These assurances are crucial because if we get caught up in a game of bureaucratic ping pong, we'll wake up one morning to find the tree not standing anymore."

In his letter to the NCC staff, Johanis suggested the tree be listed as heritage tree under a [Forests Ontario](#) program. Six heritage trees already exist in Ottawa, but none of them is on federal property. The NCC or PSPC would have to agree to this.

“At a minimum, they should research the tree’s history and review its value to the parliamentary precinct and to Canadians”, Johanis said.

Why this stately elm is a heritage tree

Pictures of the tree are available online [here](#).

The Greenspace Alliance believes the tree deserves heritage status because:

- It is associated with the prominent statue of Sir John A. MacDonald on Parliament Hill
- It has likely been there since the 1920s, maybe earlier.
- It survived the plague of Dutch Elm Disease that killed millions of elms in the 1980s all across Ontario.
- It is a landmark tree and may in fact be the largest tree remaining on Parliament Hill, which has been denuded of trees over the last 40 years.

No room for an OOPS moment

“Of paramount importance is that we avoid an OOPS moment with this tree,” said Johanis, referring to a recent statement by Mayor Jim Watson of Ottawa about how the municipality intends to stiffen fines for destruction of distinctive trees on private property in the city.

In his [state of the city address](#) on January 30, Mayor Watson said,

No longer will developers or enterprising residents have “oops” moments and a slap on the wrist after cutting significant trees during construction projects.

“We know that the elm tree on Parliament Hill does not fall under the City of Ottawa’s jurisdiction,” said Johanis. “But I echo the Mayor’s comment when it comes to this elm tree on federal lands. We can’t have an OOPS moment here.”

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