

April 5, 2018

The Honourable Carla Qualtrough
Minister of Public Services and Procurement

Dear Minister Qualtrough,

I am writing on behalf of the four organizations that are leading the effort to preserve the elm on Parliament Hill (Ecology Ottawa, the Ottawa Field Naturalists' Club, Community Associations for Environmental Sustainability and the Greenspace Alliance of Canada's Capital), and the nearly 600 Canadians from across the country who have signed our petition calling on you to save the elm.

We are appealing directly to you to take the following steps: 1) delay the removal of the centenary elm until leaf out so that its condition can be assessed fully and conclusively; 2) give some consideration to adapting the Long Range Vision and Plan for the Centre Block Rehabilitation project to take account of the climate change imperative.

These two points were raised at the meeting of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs on April 2 but in the rush to deal with the issue, much confusion arose regarding statements and evidence presented both by ourselves and by your officials, led by Mr. Rob Wright. These are the points that I wish to clarify.

The landscape architect and arborist who accompanied Mr. Wright confirmed in a response to a question from a Member that the elm has survived the winter. She reported, from her own close up visual observations in late March 2019, that buds were found all around the crown of the tree, on both the south and the northern exposure. So the fears raised in the September 2018 report that the tree was in such poor condition that it "may not make it through the winter" were not founded. When the architect commented on the May 2018 report that found the tree to be in good condition, she downplayed the value of this report as it had been done before leaf out, with therefore incomplete information. And yet, her own opinion that the elm would not likely survive 5 years was provided in the same circumstances, before leaf out. To give a truly credible prognosis on the tree's survival more than visual observation is needed. Dutch elm disease and phloem necrosis can be identified with lab analysis of samples while soil tests can detect de-icing salt in the soil. The extent of the root system can be identified with a number of methodologies. All of these should be carried out before you make your decision. Mr. Wright is on record saying the removal could be delayed until mid-summer without upsetting plans.

There was even more confusion on the issue of the configuration of Phase 2 of the Visitor Welcome complex, particularly with respect to Mr. Wright's comments about the symmetry of the design. As noted by some members of Parliament, Mr. Wright's argument for preservation of symmetry in the design does not carry much weight as the whole structure is underground, and not visible to anyone. His description, which does not yet appear in any public document and does not correspond to the diagram in the 2006 Long Range Vision and Plan document, is that it would be an elongated U-shape structure, with identical size east and west sections, linked by a transverse connection, as shown in this figure.



In reply to a question as to how the area where the tree is located could be left untouched, I proposed instead a high level design in which the eastern section of the structure extends south, under the roadway and great lawn west of the East Block, rather than north, under the elm and the other greenspace that will eventually be replaced.



These two configurations have exactly the same surface area and can present the same below grade profile from street level. The difference is that the first one requires the area where the tree is located to be completely excavated, whereas the main excavation for the second option is further to the south, away from the tree area. We believe that this approach should be given serious consideration.

We understand that even if the second option were retained, it may not be possible to preserve the centenary elm if the new assessment of health is not favourable or it is damaged during the long construction period. However, the second symmetrical option would certainly open the door to accelerating re-greening of the north east quadrant, far ahead of the completion date for the overall project. Mr. Wright is on the record stating that the possibility of accelerated greening would be considered in the "re-boot" of the long term vision and plan that is currently being undertaken. We would strongly support such an approach.

These are concrete, practical steps that can be taken to solve the conundrum of how to fulfill the functional requirements for Phase 2 of the visitor welcome complex, without necessarily having to remove the elm and be without greenspace on the Hill for the next decade or however long it will take to complete the rehabilitation project. We strongly urge you to consider these and provide instructions to your staff, as needed.

Paul Johanis
Chair, Greenspace Alliance of Canada's Capital

Attachment: Petition to save the centenary elm