Austin Parks and Recreation Department

Barton Springs Pool Tree

September 25, 2023

Review of Reports and communications from the community

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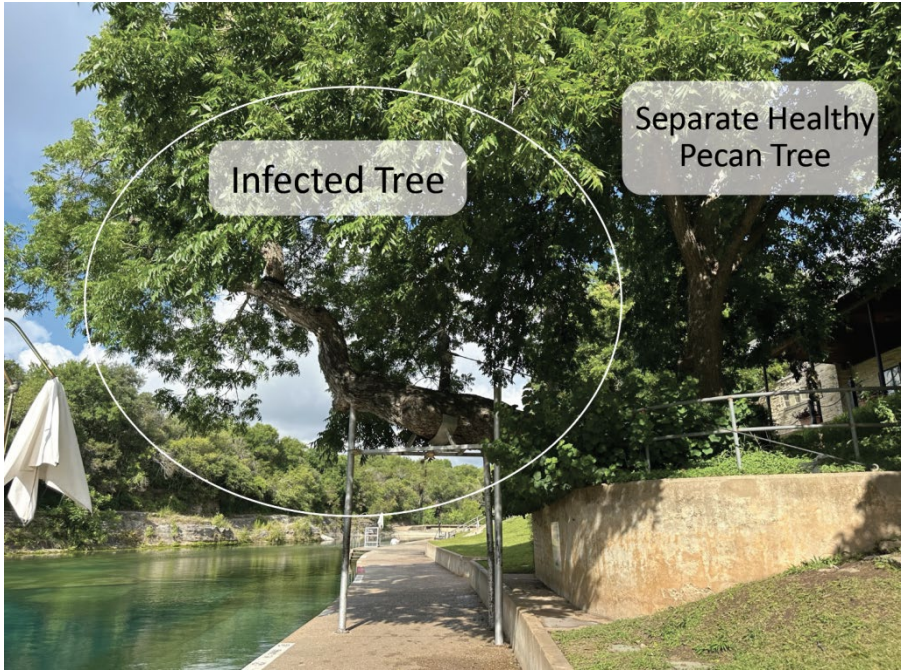
Background

- 46” diameter Pecan tree that has leaned over pool deck since the 1920’s – over 100 years old
- Iconic tree with a fatal fungal infection
- Trunk is hollow – over 90% of the trunk at the base is concrete, numerous other visible trunk cavities
- Steel structures were added to support the tree
  - First steel posts were added in the 1950’s
  - An additional steel support was added in 2009
  - 2 cables were added in 2009



Background

- July 6th – PARD staff noticed a fungal fruiting body at tree's base
  - Sample sent to Plant Diagnostic Lab at Texas A&M
- August 15th – Results confirmed brittle cinder fungus (*Kretzschmaria deusta*)
- August 15th - PARD contacted four independent ISA Certified Arborists for follow up inspections

Background

- August 18th – access restricted for public safety; additional rope added for support
- September 7th – final report received, all 4 reports identified this tree as “high” or “extreme” risk and all 4 Arborists recommended removal

Kretzschmaria deusta

- Wood-decay fungus that causes rapid decline and structural instability
  - Actively feeds on live tissue
  - Causes trees to fall over without warning, canopy looks fine prior to failure
  - The presence of the fruiting body is the warning sign
- There is no effective treatment for brittle cinder fungus
- This infection is on the portion of the trunk that is most compromised

Arborist Report Summary

Company	Overall Risk Rating	Recommendation		Alternate options to mitigate risk	Residual risk with mitigation
Austin Tree Experts	"condition rating" **Imminent Hazard**	Remove tree within 30 days		None	n/a
Heritage Tree Care	**Extreme**	Remove tree		Restrict access, including area downstream in pool	Low
Bartlett Tree Experts	**High**	Remove tree		Remove large branches	High
Arbor Vitae Tree Care	**High**	Remove tree		None	n/a

Current State

- Tree with documented risks identified from professional arborist
- Community loves this tree and PARD is working to document the importance of this tree through treestories@austintexas.gov
  - Some community support to preserve the tree as long as possible
- Barricades and cones are in place to temporarily reduce risk
  - ADA access to the pool bathrooms is currently blocked by barricades
- Buoys in the pool restrict access
  - Currently affecting lap swimmers – safety concern

Proposed State

- PARD Forestry staff agree with the consulting arborists that the safety hazards are too great and tree removal is needed
- Community support for honoring the tree
- Work with community on how best to honor this tree

Austin History Center, Austin Public Library C01818

Decision/Discussion

- Option 1 – Follow recommendation to remove the tree and solicit public comments on how best to honor/memorialize the tree
  - Reduces risk
  - Allows ADA access to reopen quickly
  - Unrestricted pool use
  - Minimizes potential for fungus to spread

Decision/Discussion

- Option 2 – Remove large limbs over pool
  - According to Bartlett, residual risk rating would remain High
  - The pruning that would be needed would likely exceed industry guidelines and further stress the tree
  - May increase risk of fungus infecting other tree
  - Access would still be restricted due to continued safety hazards
  - Additional inspections would be required, although the “trigger” for further action is not clear
  - Structural failure could still damage bypass and pool deck

Decision/Discussion

- Option 3 – Allow the tree to remain in current condition. Leave current supports in place, with long term pool deck closure and pool area restriction until tree dies of infection
  - ADA access remains blocked
  - May increase risk of fungus infecting other tree
  - Direction of failure is unpredictable as the tree is not 100% supported on steel beams and cables
  - Tree removal after failure or after tree dies is infinitely more challenging and is a significantly higher risk for the professionals involved in performing the work
  - Risk of damage to bypass and pool deck

Decision/Discussion

- Option 4 – Allow tree to remain and pursue building an additional support structure
  - May increase risk of fungus infecting other tree
  - Cost - $_____K-$____K
  - Time intensive – concept, design, fabrication, installation
  - This would introduce…..
    - an additional steel structure over the pool DRAFT EXAMPLE
    - Additional liability DRAFT EXAMPLE
  - Likely short return on investment
    - No cure for Kretzschmaria, failure is certain
    - Cannot determine rate of structural loss, could be weeks or months before a failure, but at most likely 2-3 years before it dies from the infection


Questions


DANGER
DO NOT
ENTER