

28 August 2023

## Impending Demise of the Old, Rare Brown Woolly Fig and California State Champion Big Tree at the Santa Ana Downtown Main Library

The City of Santa Ana has decided to chop down and remove the old, rare Brown Woolly Fig tree (*Ficus drupacea*) and California State Champion Big Tree at the Santa Ana Downtown Main Library (<https://www.santa-ana.org/main-library-patio-to-become-community-and-event-space/>), all under the guise to “preserve and enhance library facilities and services.” The City claims the tree must be destroyed to “make way for a complete renovation of the library’s east patio, transforming it into a vibrant, welcoming, and accessible community and event space for everyone.” To the contrary, incorporating this tree into the renovation plans would ensure that the City lives up to these claims.

### Facts Regarding this Tree and the Library Renovation:

1. This specimen is rare, very few occur in the United States, and it is the largest of its kind in California. It is listed in the California Big Tree Registry (<https://californiabigtrees.calpoly.edu/bt-tree-detail/548>) as the State Champion. While larger specimens might exist in tropical Florida and Hawaii, no nationwide registry exists for non-native trees; thus, it is the largest, officially registered tree of its kind in the United States.
2. This tree, affectionately known as the “Parrot Tree” for the colorful birds that visit it to eat its fruits, provides much-needed, cooling shade for the library and oxygen for us to breathe, helps to mitigate ever-increasing temperatures, capture rainfall, provides shelter and food for birds and other wildlife, greatly softens the otherwise harsh urban setting, and enhances our psychological well-being, all measurable and admirable qualities. Destroying and removing it and replacing it with a smaller tree that would take scores of years, if ever, to provide these same benefits and amenities seems especially shortsighted.
3. The City has not provided a certified arborist’s report to document and support its claims that the tree’s roots and canopy are damaging the building’s foundation and façade, now or in the future. Even if this threat was real, judicious and careful root and canopy pruning can mitigate such

potential damage. While the City's claim that the "buttressing root system" can reach up to 30 feet in diameter is true for wet tropical locales, it is flatly untrue for arid, subtropical California.

4. The City's claim that litter from fruits and leaves is a hazard and will require an increased budget for periodic cleanup is rather weak. All trees produce leaf and fruit litter, so any trees of which the City plans to replant will be subject to the same or similar considerations. Furthermore, most landscape maintenance companies would prefer to be cleaning up fewer, larger leaves and fruits than much more numerous, smaller leaves and fruits. The City also claims that the fruits attract wasps, yet it provides no evidence to support this assertion, such as a biologist's report identifying the nature and type of wasp; the purported wasp could easily be non-harmful hover flies, which mimic wasps.
5. The City purports to be "committed to replacing every tree in the space," yet has not provided a detailed landscape plan, including tree species, quantity, and spacing, to document and support this assertion.
6. That the City does not consider the tree historical and worthy of preservation is questionable. The City's definition of historic seems rather narrowly tailored, and would offer no protection for nearly all of Santa Ana's trees, no matter their age, size, rarity, location, or esthetic quality, in the City's well known and respected urban forest. The premise that only historic trees can be preserved is shortsighted and discounts the numerous amenities and benefits that trees, especially old, large, rare and strategically placed specimens, bring to the table.
7. The tree's significant location adjacent to the main center of learning and enlightenment in Santa Ana, make its destruction all the more harmful and unnecessary. It could easily and less expensively be incorporated into the City's plans for the library renovation. Removing the concrete surrounding the tree and replacing it with one of a multitude of modern, technologically advanced, permeable surfaces along with the amphitheater type seating would create an instant, outdoor, cool, green, leafy, and unique educational and event meeting venue. To destroy it is illogical and contrary to the best interests of the citizens of Santa Ana and society as a whole.

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