

**To: Mayor Lisa Helps and Victoria City Councillors**

**From:**

Richard and Patricia Wells [3120 Jackson](#); Mark Kozlowski and Bisia Belina [3180 Jackson](#);  
Barbara McDonnell [3159-B Jackson](#); Linda Woolford [3145 Jackson](#); Erica Davis-Lehman and Tyson Bailey  
[3166 Somerset](#) ; Lorraine Russell, James Russell and Greg Wills [3140 Jackson](#); Jose Lima [3162 Jackson](#);  
Bruce and Patricia Bouvet [3125 Jackson](#); Rick Dheensaw - [3123 Jackson](#); Charlotte Breakspear [3132 Jackson](#);  
Stuart and Carla Grenke [3184 Jackson](#); Ila Willerton [3159-B Jackson](#); Christine Luong & Anatoli Skripnitchenko [3174 Jackson St](#) ; (+100 meters) Aaron and Elizabeth Post [3112 Jackson](#)

**December 04, 2020**

**Issue:**

Rezoning of 3150 Somerset Street for two new duplexes will likely result in the destruction or radical alteration of one or more large Garry Oak Wildlife Trees - which are approximately 300 years old

**Background:**

The +90% support rate by nearby and adjacent neighbours, as indicated in the proposal for rezoning 3150 Somerset into two duplex lots, is likely incorrect in view of information not shared regarding the planned removal of two large Garry Oak trees.

Discussions with several nearby/affected neighbours indicated they had not been contacted about this proposal. Due to wording, format and internal rezoning language - most folks we talked to, who actually read the City of Victoria Proposed Development Notice, believed the rezoning application was to simply rezone the existing single-family zoned lot into two single family lots (versus two new duplex lots). With only one exception, no one realized that large Wildlife trees were at risk of being destroyed or altered. These two at-risk Garry Oak trees appear to be noted on plans as tagged and/or registered.

The Pandemic limited our neighbourhood discussions. Only two neighbours who noticed the November 17 date were actually able to attend the Hillside/Quadra NAG/CALUC meeting. Additionally, the unusually small font size indicating "December 4" as the date to submit written comments to the City is concerning - as that date for action was also missed by most neighbours we talked with.

**Discussion:**

Neighbours are struggling with a decision to support rezoning and development versus saving the large Garry Oaks. Our outstanding questions are: what is the significance of destroying or radically altering these trees, and what is the overall effect on Victoria's Urban Forest and associated wildlife?

Due to the fragility of Victoria's remaining fractured ecosystems, one Arborist, hired by a developer or the city, should not decide the fate of any of the remaining Garry Oak trees in Victoria. There needs to be multiple reviews and opinions by independent experts regarding the fate of these particular species of trees, particularly large, mature Garry Oaks such as the ones growing at 3150 Somerset.

Last month a mature Garry Oak on Jackson St. was destined for removal by an independent Arborist, only to be reassessed by a City Arborist who stated the tree was basically fine and needed pruning to remove deadwood. The property owners and neighbours were relieved that Garry Oak has been saved.

The existing duplex at 3150 Somerset was likely built around the 1950's. The developer and/or City Council at that time likely chose to save these two large Garry Oak trees by building around them.

A few years ago City of Victoria staff reviewed a huge Garry Oak Wildlife tree located at 3132 Jackson St. and determined it was approximately 300 years old. One of the Garry Oaks at 3150 Somerset appears to be larger than that tree. Garry Oaks can have a life span of 500 years when humans do not interfere.

These two trees can be easily saved. The developer /owner could subdivide 3150 Somerset to make two single family homes, resulting in much smaller footprints. Two single family homes could blend in much better with the existing neighbourhood; one or more Garden Suites could also be added.

Preserving these mature Garry Oak trees is critical to keep Victoria's fractured Garry Oak Ecosystems alive and thriving. Several small immature replacement Garry Oak trees will not compensate for the loss of even one large, mature Wildlife tree.

Many animals, insects and birds inhabit these ancient, slow-growing Garry Oaks. Just this year, the neighborhood has seen a return of Cooper's hawks and their young, and owls flying between these and nearby Garry Oaks; as a result there has been a significant, noticeable reduction in the rat and invasive Gray squirrel populations in the local area.

Garry Oaks have cycles of being healthy and also of being stressed or diseased. Landowners, Arborists and tree fallers in the past have mistakenly removed many large Victoria Garry Oaks only to discover remaining neighbouring Garry Oaks recover and thrive a year or two, or even a decade later. Just like humans – trees such as Garry Oaks can get diseases, and just like humans, they often fully recover.

Garry Oaks and their associated ecosystems are the most diverse and rarest of all BC forest ecosystems, supporting a huge diversity of natural life. It is important to note that Garry Oaks grow much slower than coniferous trees. Left unchecked, non-native, often-introduced coniferous trees such as Fir, Cedar and Pine grow rapidly and crowd out the older, established Garry Oaks, depriving them of sunlight and nutrients while also dropping needles and changing the ecosystem soil to an unnatural acidic condition.

The cost of these duplexes (if built) would likely be out of reach for purchase or rental by the City's "Missing Middle Housing" population.

### **Conclusion:**

Two single family homes, possibly with a Garden Suite could be more fitting with this neighbourhood where most homes are still situated on large, thriving lots. This area was once part of a dairy farm and an orchard, and prior to that it was all part of the world's best example of the rare Garry Oak ecosystem.

We owe it to the City of Victoria, the immediate surrounding neighbours and to our future generations (both human and wildlife) to restrict the footprints of new buildings in Victoria when they threaten to encroach on our struggling original ecosystems. These are large, senior Wildlife trees we are talking about here, part of Victoria's very fragmented, dwindling selection of mature Garry Oaks forest areas.

If the neighborhood was accurately canvassed and residents were asked if they were in support of destroying or radically alternating these two very old, very large Garry Oak trees – we believe you would find a large percentage of informed people would likely reject this proposal for rezoning and development.

### **Links and Information:**

<https://creativelyunited.org/community-trees-matter-network/>

<http://www.garryoak.info/links.html>

<https://www.vancourier.com/opinion/the-more-i-learn-about-humans-the-more-i-like-trees-1.2311263#:~:text=According%20to%20Parks%20Canada%2C%20Garry,or%20damages%20their%20iconic%20tree.>

<https://www.for.gov.bc.ca/hfd/library/documents/treebook/garryoak.htm>

<https://www.goert.ca/documents/restorationbooklet/GOERT-restoration-booklet-all.pdf>

<https://www.austinmonitor.com/stories/2018/04/whats-the-story-behind-the-different-tags-on-trees-around-austin/>