Cynthia's Blue Palms

City of Key West Tree Commission September 2, 2015

Following are my findings of evaluation concerning the Strangler Fig tree growing at Captain Tony's Saloon property located at 428 Greene Street, Key West, Florida.

I was retained by the tree trimmer Dave Cunningham, owner Islandscaping, Inc. I was asked to 'evaluate an improperly trimmed Strangler Fig tree and recommend a plan to resolve the improper trim'.

FACT The historically significant Strangler Fig tree, named the 'Hanging Tree', is growing from the interior of Capt. Tony's Saloon. The roof was built around the trunk. The canopy of the tree is growing over the roof. According to the City of Key West Urban Foresters staff report the tree was last pruned prior to June 19, 2015 improperly and without a Tree Commission approved permit.

The **Strangler Fig, *Ficus aurea***, tree is considered a large maturing and fast growing tree maturing at heights of 40-60 ft. and width of 20-60 ft. with a listed life span from Florida Native Plant Society as 'long-lived perennial'. Ficus tree species is also listed by Dr. Ed Gilman, internationally known leading expert in arboriculture, as a poor compartmentalizer and prone to decay.

Evaluation/Findings The Strangler Fig growing at 428 Greene St. is mature and purported historical age to be over 150 years. Within the building the trunk is 32.5 diameter inches measured at approximately 4' above the grade of soil (photo 1). Concrete surrounds the tree trunk, 360` hence no root inspection possible. The condition of the tree is poor with 3 remaining scaffolding branches above the roof with no main leader. The trees trunk is in poor condition with a slight lean. A large column of decay was noted on the upper trunk (inside the building) that extends from approximately 7.5 ft. above the concrete grade upward toward the NE (above roof) scaffolding branch terminus of same branch. The connecting branch union was also impacted with decay (photo 2). Inspection of the portion of tree

immediately connecting trunk to scaffolding branches was not possible due to ceiling and roof built around tree (photo 3). Colonies of insects; ants and possibly termites were noted from the trees base to the top of tree (photo 4). Past photographs depict historical pruning events in which the tree appears to have been topped. The remaining large limb was topped showing vigorous adventitious sprouting with decay (photo 5). Also noted were complete large branch removals with open decay wounds, cracking/splitting, sun scald and adventitious sprouting branches over 4' in length (photo 6). Recent severe pruning has forced some adventitious sprouting on all limbs (photo 7). Above the roof a thick shower liner was nailed to cover one of the branches past removed to hinder rain from entering into to the building (photo 8). Also noted is what appears to be a rubbery white paint used to seal the tree and roof from water intrusion. This painting surrounds the trunk at roof junction (photo 9).

Current pruning events indicate all remaining scaffolding branches, except one growing to the south, removed by indiscriminate topping cuts. The NE remaining scaffolding branch is an upward severally topped flat cut with no pitch; sprouting has begun in several locations on branch. The NW remaining scaffolding branch is severally topped with slight pitch; adventitious sprouting has begun in several locations on branch. The Southernmost remaining scaffolding branch splits to the east and south. The eastern branch is severally topped; adventitious sprouting has begun in several locations on branch. The southernmost lions-tailed branch remains intact with several improperly pruned cuts; one jagged the other ripped and adventitious sprouting has begun in several locations on branch (photo 10).

I conclude that due to current conditions of this tree; maturity, decayed condition, setting of tree (encased in building) and past and current pruning events that tree death is highly possible. However, if the decision to retain the tree is made due diligence of many pruning events over a number of years is required. Trees do not heal; they simply build new tissue around wounded areas.

Objectives for Restoration

Restore tree canopy by managing sprouts. Reduce potential hazardous conditions, improve tree structure and longevity.

Specific Procedures

1) Hire an International Society of Arboriculture certified arborist to administer ANSI A300 pruning standards.

2) If required, Cable remaining lions-tailed branch, to reduce likelihood of branch failure. Correctly prune recent cuts. Correctly prune ripped cut below the point of the tear to allow the wound to seal over properly, if possible, or trace ripped wound to allow closure.

3) Inspect tree quarterly for first year to remove dead branches and evaluate trees condition, then annually for 5 years.

4) Adventitious sprouts shall be allowed to remain and develop on entire tree for minimum of 2 years. Then clean, reduce, and thin, sprouts along the entire length of the limbs removing not more than 10% of sprouting. Adventitious sprouts are in response to over-pruning in an attempt to replace the stored energy. Wait until sprout growth slows before next pruning visit.

5) Due to the condition, maturity and setting of the tree large branches shall not be allowed to develop.

6) No live branches larger than 3 inches diameter shall be removed without prior approvals and/or permits.

7) A written evaluation should be submitted to owner and Urban Forestry Manager at end of second and fifth year to determine whether the tree is recovering or declining and make any adjustments to procedures if required.

If you have any questions concerning this report please contact me at 305/747-2141.

Cynthia Domenech-Coogle, ISA Certified Arborist, FL 0277A

References
An Illustrated Guide to Pruning, Second Edition by Edward F. Gilman. Copyright 2002


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