

Karen DeMaria

From: pmginsberg . <pmginsberg@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, August 01, 2017 2:19 PM
To: Craig Cates; Karen DeMaria
Subject: official tree of key west proposal

August 1, 2017

Dear Mr. Mayor,

It has recently been reported in the Citizen that you are planning to name the Royal Poinciana as the Official Tree of Key West.

I think that this is a great mistake, for the following reasons:

1. The Royal Poinciana (RP) is NOT a native - it's native to Madagascar. As a multi-generational Conch, you are proud of your heritage as was your mother who I remember when she served in city government and before that with Mother Nature's Bounty. I would think that given your heritage you would likewise name a native tree, with an even longer heritage, to represent Key West.
2. While certainly picturesque, the RP presents a continual maintenance problem for the homeowner whose property contains one of these trees: Like a tourist, it is certainly appreciated for its contribution to Key West, but the negative aspects attached to this contribution requires that we expend dollars/time to deal with it. As a long term Mayor of KW, you know intimately what the tourists provide and especially what they cost the city each year. As residents, we both know the disruption to our relatively peaceful way of life (e.g. Poker Run) that accompanies their monetary contributions. The RPs pose a similar problem: For the one month that the RP serves to dazzle us with its beauty, the homeowner or city has 10 months of maintenance (there is that other month where nothing falls), e.g.: sweeping up fallen blossoms, followed by a constant stream of leaf stems, pods and leaflets. Then there is the expense of regular trimming not to mention the rampant 90% germination rate of the seeds ensuring that new generations are always growing underneath. In addition RPs are soft, prone to termite damage and have only a 40 year life span requiring even more \$\$ to be eventually taken down before they incur serious damage to one's property and/or life.. Unlike the Conchs descended from Spanish Wells families, the RP is not a tree that endures - not even for the lifetime of a person. In a botanical sense, it's a "flash in the pan", a carpetbagger, an out of town developer - here today - gone tomorrow - the arboreal equivalent of a day tripping tourist.
3. There is a multitude of Native Trees that will outlive all of the RPs on our island, grow taller, wider, provide more shade and would represent our island city much better than RPs. The advantages of a native tree are many. Among these advantages are: resiliency, long life, integral to our particular geographical location and actually contributing to our unique Ecosystem (Zone 11 - the only one in the continental US) having co-evolved over tens of thousands of years with the insects, birds, and mammals that are also native to our semi-tropical zone. They are, in essence like a native, multi-generational Conch such as yourself. They don't thrive well outside of their native zone, if at all. They were present in our zone/biome before Juan Salas even heard of this island.
4. The allure of the RP is understandable: Its blossoms are striking - some call them "Flame Trees" - and for good reason. It's always a pleasurable sight to see one in bloom and the shade that it provides is a welcome relief from our hot tropical sun. But, like the Australian "Pines", they do not contribute anything to the support of our ecosystem: to the native animals and insects they might as well be made of cardboard - because, in effect, they don't belong here (plus, both inhibit the growth of native plants). They are only valuable in the sense of what they do for US - shade and visual impact. It's an example of what I call the ECOSYSTEM VS. EGOSYSTEM conundrum - we like the ornamental berries on the Brazilian Pepper or the water uptake of the Melaleuca (introduced by Perrine to help drain the "swamp" now known as the

Everglades). Likewise the blossoms on the Schefflera, or the dense fence/hedge that the Ficus Benjamina provides. The creeping fig (Ficus pumila), one of the most popular plants on the island, is used to cover a masonry wall but eventually escapes its boundaries and takes over the wall next door, a house, etc.. These plants, like the Royal Poinciana, are invasive exotics that will run rampant if not constantly and actively managed or eradicated. Native trees and plants are not like that.

5. If you name the RP as the Official Tree of Key West, what's next - naming the brilliantly colored and showy Lionfish as the official fish, the multi-colored, exotic Iguana as the official reptile, the Cuban tree frog (which has all but decimated our native tree frog) as the KW amphibian, the chicken as the official bird or Coral Vine or Bouganvillea as our official flower? At least name one of our Native Trees as the Official Tree of Key West based on the fact that it has been here for thousands of years, is an integral, if not key part of our ecosystem while also giving us shade and in past years, survival benefits and/or medicinal offerings

6. I have a number of Native Trees in mind that I would like you to consider as our Official Tree rather than the RP. A few come to mind immediately, like the Gumbo Limbo which is native to our zone: It is, like a Conch, hardy, hurricane resistant, provides dense shade, is fast growing, is a botanical "jack of all trades" in terms of folk remedies that soothed, treated and, in some cases, saved the lives of the pioneers of the Keys as well as providing food, nesting sites and shelter for native birds, like the Mockingbird and White Crowned Pigeon and native insects (native insects, an important food source for native birds, only thrive on native plants - the rest, like the RP might as well be made of cardboard from an insect's POV). The Gumbo Limbo is a much better candidate for Official Tree than is the invasive, exotic Royal Poinciana.

7. Other trees besides the Gumbo Limbo like the native Lysoloma or Wild Tamarind would also be a wonderful choice. This tree has a spreading, shade-giving crown, serves as a larva food for many species of native butterflies, a nectar source for others and the primary habitat for the Native Florida tree snail. It is a strong tree that can withstand hurricane force winds. The RP cannot (A 30 foot RP fell in my yard during Hurricane Georges). This is a similar choice along with the Gumbo Limbo.

8. There are a host of other native trees, like those in the Stopper family (white, simpson or spanish) or the Mahogany, Sapodilla, Spanish lime, Geiger tree, Bahama Strongback or Ligum Vitae, for example, that not only provide food and sustenance to the animals/ insects that make up our ecosystem, but which also served to support the lives and lifestyles of the pioneers who first settled the Keys as well as the indigenous people who thrived here before them. All of these trees, imbued with history and major contributors to a healthy Keys ecosystem would serve as better candidates for the title of Official Tree of Key West than the exotic, invasive, ecologically useless (and detrimental), Royal Poinciana of Madagascar..

I urge you, Mr. Mayor to reconsider your proposal and name a NATIVE TREE to represent the Island City of Key West. I sincerely hope you will take this into consideration before you, in my opinion, elevate an invasive, exotic outsider to represent Key West. That would be like commissioning a bust of Julius Stone to reside alongside the busts of past patriarchs of Key West in the Sculpture Garden by Mallory Dock - yeah, he helped KW in 1938 but left soon afterwards and while here was never considered to be anything but an outsider.

I would be happy to discuss this further with you at any time.

Sincerely,

Peter Ginsberg
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Key West, Florida