



Notes on Elm Trees from February 25 Open House – Couch Park

Health:

The two elm trees at the north edge of the playground in Couch Park are in decline. You may be aware of the impacts of Dutch Elm Disease that is killing the nation's elm trees, Portland included.

According to the certified arborist's assessment, verified by the City's Urban Forestry Inspector assigned to the project, these two elms exhibit:

- dieback
- water sprouts
- dead branches
- branch decay

Due to these conditions, they have increased risk potential and susceptibility to Dutch Elm Disease.

The tree that has the two trunks (codominant stems in arborist terminology) just above ground level also has some included bark, a point of weakness between the two codominant stems, and wetwood, which is caused by bacteria.

The trees are located on a slope with the north edge diving down significantly in elevation within the playground.

Other Concerns:

- We also need to keep in mind the safety of the children in the playground.
- Based on the current condition, health of the trees, and impacts from construction, we believe the elm trees will become a safety hazard and would need to come down within the foreseeable future.
- Because these large trees are in the play area, we have to weigh the value of retaining trees in the short term with the long term safety of the





children using the play area.

- We are not allowed to fill more than a few inches of soil over roots as it suffocates them.
- To retain these two trees until they submit to their anticipated inevitable demise from progressive decline or Dutch Elm Disease, the playground design would have to leave that sloping area as it is which would limit the usable, ADA accessible space in that area.
- We also cannot place the synthetic play surfacing, an important element of an inclusive playground, within several feet of trees, which would further limit the use of that entire area of the playground.
- The playground is pretty limited in space already and is heavily used (up to 150 children at one time during MLC lunch/recess).
- With the added \$500,000 funding promised by Friends of Couch Playground and Harper's Playground to supplement the Parks Bond funding in order to create an inclusive playground, we are working very hard to maximize every inch of the playground space and make it as inclusive as possible.

Conclusion:

We try to retain trees that are in good health and form in our projects. Based on the evaluation by the arborist and Urban Forestry staff, the elms are not good candidates for retention because they are not sustainable and are increasingly hazardous. Construction around them will only exacerbate that process.

While we certainly don't prefer to cut down trees in our parks, sometimes it is the most practical decision to do so, and our team believes that is the case with these elms.

Portland has taken great efforts to preserve healthy elm trees, and keeping compromised trees such as these may impact other elm trees in the area. Though it's sad to lose any trees, based on our experience with other park renovation projects with fairly dense canopies of trees, we do not expect the removal of the elms to create a significantly noticeable absence in the park.

Adjacent trees with crowded canopy growth tend to spread out their canopies





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further once an adjacent tree has been removed. With their location on the north side of the playground, the two elms are mostly casting shadows to the north and east (an already extremely shady area of the park and street). There are many large deciduous street trees (Norway maples, red oaks, and red maples) in the right-of-way planting strip about 25' to the north on NW Hoyt.

There are also numerous large deciduous trees just to the east of the elms on the slope (such as Norway maple, European beech, red oak, sweetgum, and green ash trees) in Couch Park, along with the large horse chestnut tree to the south of the elms within the playground that we are working to retain since its health and anticipated lifespan is much better than the elms.

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