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Linden tree gone, view of library wows onlookers

Pieces of tree said to be wanted for souvenirs

Discussion begins on replacement, perhaps an elm

By Marilyn Miller

The library's old linden tree is gone, felled by volunteers and Shannon Tree Service last week, its wood carted off to the transfer station where it will stay until the selectmen decide how to dispose of it.

Several ideas have been offered already on how to turn pieces of wood into mementos the public may want to buy.

Debra DeJonker-Berry, library director, is keeping a list of all the people who have asked for pieces of the tree.

The huge stump remains. It looks healthy, but if you take a screwdriver and poke at it, it will crumble away, said Selectman David Atkinson, a tree surgeon who helped to take the tree down.

DeJonker and Elizabeth Patrick, chairman of the beautification committee, told the selectmen Monday that they'd like to see the tree replaced with another linden that is already 15 to 20 feet tall, enough to provide shade while it continues to grow. They said they'd like to see it planted next spring.

Atkinson said he'd prefer to see it replaced with an American elm. Lindens are beautiful, but they also attract carpenter ants, are prone to internal rot and are messy, he said.

He's already found a two-story high American elm in New Hampshire that a former 50-year resident of Provincetown who is now in a rest home has offered to donate and pay the \$1,500 relocation costs.

The donor wants to remain anonymous, he said. If the selectmen agree to take him up on this offer and the tree dies within five years Atkinson said he will pay for a smaller replacement tree.

American elms used to line Commercial Street until they were felled by disease and the hurricane of

1938, he said. But this elm is disease resistant, he said.

The selectmen agreed they're not ready now to decide what kind of tree they'll replant or even if they'll replant another tree.

Selectman Betty Steele-Jeffers, chairman, said she knew it sounded like heresy, but she likes the way the library looks with the tree gone. "I Like being able to see the building," she said. "I really get a kick out of seeing it and the nice brick patio. I bet people working on the computers on the third floor are getting an absolutely superb view of the harbor."

DeJonker said John Dowd, an artist who is on the beautification committee, said with the tree gone the architecture of the building is now being noticed. "We've all noticed it," she said. "It's a new world, but there's an awful lot of sunshine and it's hot."

Selectman Cheryl Andrews said she went downtown expecting to "cry" when he saw the tree gone, but instead she was amazed by the view of the building.

Susan Hoffman, a former library trustee, without naming names, told the selectmen that one of the volunteers working on cutting the tree down "sold outright a piece of that tree to a tourist on the spot, calling it an executive decision. He gave the money to library. I felt that was a very inappropriate thing to do before any decision on disposition was made. I was very disappointed. I felt this was an inappropriate way to raise money."

Andrews said she was distressed to hear that someone had a piece of wood from the tree. "If anyone gave away pieces of that tree for a fee I can't let that pass without a statement. It's town property, and it's not his right to sell it," she said.

"I'm guilty," Atkinson said, candidly admitting to making this executive decision. "No good deed goes unpunished."

He said passersby constantly asked him if they could have a piece of the tree while he was cutting it down. He told them the library was keeping a list of people who wanted relics from the tree and that they could sign up.

But one older woman, an out-of-towner, was so persistent that he finally offered to sell her a small piece at price he said he thought she'd surely refuse. "I said it's \$15 if you want this piece right now to take home. She gave me \$20 and I gave it to the library," he said.

A Libertarian with little or no use for government, Atkinson said he fears that the tree remains will simply rot at the transfer station or "disappear some day in a chipper. There's more wood out there than you'll ever want to have. You can make a million pieces out of that tree and one piece will not be missed."

But that was not the point said Steele-Jeffers. "It's the process," she said. The board agreed to discuss possible ways to dispose of the wood at their July 26 meeting.

"We need input on what will happen to the wood," Andrews said.

Hoffman suggested creating two-inch diameter chips, placing a library sticker designed by Harvey Dodd on them, shellacking them and selling them as souvenirs for about \$2 each.

Atkinson said when people were asking him for a chip he told them that the library was keeping a list of people who wanted the wood and that artists were going to get the first choice since they'd be making pieces of art out of them.

"Who decided that?" Andrews said.

"That was my impression," he said.

"Who told you that?" Andrews said..

"Maybe the ozone," Atkinson said. "I don't know where it came from, but that's what I thought was going to happen."

Until they decide what to do with the wood, "no one should have access to it," Andrew said.

DPW Director David Guertin assured her that "there has been no feeding frenzy" over the wood chips and limbs. "No one has access to it," he said.



Advocate photos by Ed Bilodeau and Marilyn Miller

*Above: Provincetown Library shortly before the damaged old linden tree was removed
Left: The building, now exposed, surprises passersby with its beauty*