

✓ TREES Ax hangs over pepper tree

City Council to decide fate

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SANTA CRUZ — The fate of the landmark California pepper tree at Cedar and Lincoln streets rests with the City Council.

Staff members are recommending the council support their findings that the tree is too ravaged by disease to be allowed to stand.

The council will consider the request at the second portion of its meeting, which begins at 7 p.m. in the council chamber at City Hall.

Opponents of the request to remove the tree — submitted by owners, the Calvary Episcopal Church, in early November — said evidence has not convinced them the popular tree is beyond help.

"Although the tree looks ill, I believe it can still be saved," said Deborah Malkin, a representative of the Sierra Club, in a letter to the city.

"This particular tree has become a landmark in the downtown area and would provide great benefit to many people if saved. It adds character and



Dan Coyro/Sentinel file

Children play on landmark tree outside Calvary Episcopal Church.

charm to the downtown, as well as providing shade under which people may rest on warm summer days." City officials, on the other hand, said they have

had four experts independently evaluate the tree, and each recommended the pepper tree be cut down.

They said several diseases had prog-

ressed so far that the tree no longer was safe.

"Insect damage as well as extensive root and cavity rot has rendered the tree unstable and its branches weak," said a staff report after the review. "Since virtually all the limbs are in peril, no one or series of limbs can be removed to remove the hazard."

A tentative permit to cut down the tree was issued by the Parks and Recreation Department in mid-April, but that decision was appealed a week later.

The Parks and Recreation Commission reviewed the appeal, and then denied it on June 3.

But Malkin and county resident Mitchell Azus both appealed the commission's decision in mid-June.

The final blow now must be struck by the City Council.

Reports indicate that in full foliage the tree would be about 30 feet tall and have a limb spread of 66 feet.

The tree is sparsely foliated because there is little root system left after years of attack by insects, said officials.

The tree is believed to have been planted in the 1930s.

City ordinance allows removal of heritage trees only in specific instances, which include "the physical condition or health of the tree or shrub, such as disease or infestation."