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# The University of Georgia

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Daniel B. Warnell School of Forestry and Natural Resources  
Forestry, Wildlife, Water and Soil Resources, Fisheries and Aquaculture,  
Natural Resource Recreation and Tourism

May 18, 2009

Mr. Christopher Morgan  
Division Director – Planning, Preservation & Sustainability  
City of Charleston  
75 Calhoun Street – Third Floor  
Charleston, SC 29401

Dear Mr. Morgan:

I have been asked to review written statements regarding the long term health and conservation of the Angel Oak by Dr. Don Ham, a tree health care and development consultant involved with what was called the Angle Oak Village project. I was asked to review statements regarding development activities, their impacts on the Angel Oak, and whether the proposed procedures, process, and treatments would have a positive outcome for the continued health and structural integrity of the tree over the short and long run.

I was asked to be a reviewer because of my standing in the tree health care profession, my extensive worldwide experience with mature / over mature trees, and my work with geriatric trees and how they age. I am a professor of tree biology and health care at the University of Georgia. I have produced hundreds of publications on tree health care issues. I was elected to many leadership positions in arboriculture and community forestry, including world president of the International Society of Arboriculture. I have also been granted two of the highest competitive world awards for education and scientific writing in the tree health care profession. In addition, I have served as counselor to many communities, attorneys, and consultants on environmental management of trees and sites, including coastal landscapes and live oaks..

I have visited the Angel Oak site four times over many years, once at the City of Charleston's invitation to examine tree health care issues and site problems. I am familiar with the tree and site. I have followed and reviewed a long thread of reports, newspaper articles, and letters to the editor starting with Dr. Ham's report to Mr. Martin dated August 14, 2008. Since that report, I have read more than 21 written documents regarding the Angel Oak available on-line from your City newspaper's site (i.e. The Post & Courier).

In my reading regarding the Angel Oak, there has been much misunderstanding, misinterpretation, and tree illiteracy regarding the biology and ecology of aging tree growth and development. This lack of current tree knowledge, shown by a number of authors, is troubling (in the least) and dangerous (at most) when considering the future health of the tree and sustainability of the site under tree control.

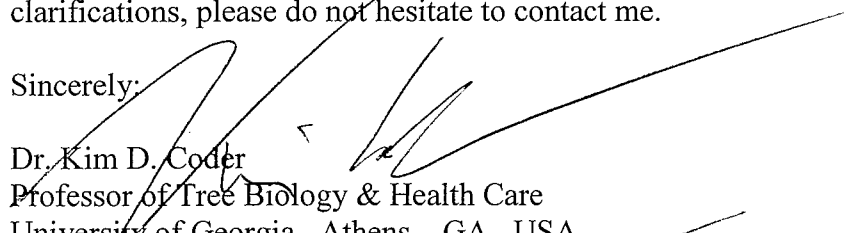
After review, it is my professional opinion the recommendations of your arboricultural and hydrologic consultants, coupled with the newest development plan modifications (article May 13, 2009), will prevent any significant negative impacts to the Angel Oak. The original space provided, as well as the expanded space now planned for the tree, is more than is needed for its sustained health. In addition, the carefully considered and well-planned care proposals by Dr. Ham for the Angel Oak are in keeping with the best practices across the nation and the world tree health care profession. I encourage you to trust in the expertise and experience of Dr. Ham.

I have worked in this area long enough to understand this is not a tree problem, although the Angel oak is held up as a focal point. This type of community development problem is seen all over the Sunbelt where neighborhoods must come to a consensus on development activities and join together in sharing a mutual vision for the future of their properties and surroundings. As such, the Angel Oak becomes entangled in the politics of expectations without ownership or responsibility. The Angel Oak is not threatened as currently proposed and could actually be better off over the long run.

Unfortunately the Angel Oak is threatened by its admirers and defenders. There is a serious and long term threat, including compound stress elevations and physical damage to the tree and the site from human and vehicular traffic. It is the current access road, parking and foot traffic which represents a clear and present danger. Tree lovers are stressing, and will kill, their tree unless something is done soon. It is not a relatively distant development but parking and walking near the tree which will significantly and permanently damage the Angel Oak.

If you have any questions or concerns about what I have stated here, or wish further clarifications, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely:



Dr. Kim D. Coder  
Professor of Tree Biology & Health Care  
University of Georgia, Athens, GA USA