

As we reported Tuesday, a specially convened deaccession review panel charged with deciding whether to remove the city-owned **totem pole** in Fireman's Park from the municipal arts collection recommended that it remain part of Tacoma's collected public artworks.

Now, the Landmarks Preservation Commission is expected to separately determine what should be done with the aging pole that has become a falling hazard and is temporarily fenced off and braced. Such options could include shoring the pole in place, preserving and cleaning it, taking it down, finding a place indoors to display it and/or even commissioning a new pole to stand in its place.

On May 26, 1924, the Los Angeles Newsboys' Quartette posed in front of the Tacoma Hotel and **totem pole**. Source: Marvin D. Boland Collection, Tacoma Public Library

Historic Preservation Officer Reuben McKnight is set to provide the landmarks board with a staff report, including cost analyses of various options, that the commission will consider at its June 12 meeting.

The review panel — which included a Puyallup Indian carver, an art dealer, city arts and landmarks commissioners, museum curators and a city planner — held an in-depth discussion about the pole before recommending to keep it in the municipal arts collection.

The meeting was rather long, and divulged a number of informative tidbits about the pole, which — due to space constraints — didn't make it into our story Tuesday. Among them:

- The eagle currently at the top of the pole is not the original. It was a replacement icon carved and added onto the pole in the 1970s (Shaun Peterson, Puyallup Indian artist).
- The pole stands 72 feet above ground, with another 9-plus feet fitted into a culvert dug into the ground as a base of support (Frank Terrill, City Senior Plans Examiner).
- There's currently no location indoors that has been identified to display the pole (City arts administrator Amy McBride). The Washington State History Museum has been approached, but declined to display it based on maintenance and funding considerations (WA history museum curator Lynette Miller). The Greater Tacoma Trade & Convention Center is not an option because its potential space now houses other public art works (old growth timbers reclaimed from the buildings that stood on the site where the convention center now occupies) (McBride).
- The pole was professionally treated last September with pesticide to rid it for insects. Hundreds of carpenter ants fell out of the pole at that time. Yet despite the treatment, carpenter ants remain a risk because they've infested the railroad ties and other wood throughout Fireman's Park (Terrill).
- Though historical records suggest the pole was carved by Alaskan or British Columbian Natives,

its iconography appears dubious. The figures contain a mixture of commercial and traditional imagery. The icons are also much more elongated than those of authentic Northwest Coast totem poles, probably because the log used for the carvings was thinner and taller than typical — to make Tacoma's **totem pole** taller than Seattle's. Unlike traditional Haida poles, which are hollowed out at the back, Tacoma's totem is carved with a whole log. (Peterson; Robin K. Wright, Native American art curator, Burke Museum).

– The pole has been painted several times, often randomly and in colors not traditionally associated with totem poles, such as pastels and a golden hue (Peterson, Wright, McBride).

– At least two different plans to brace the pole in place have been suggested by engineers since April. PCS Structural Solutions recommended erecting two steel poles as part of a permanent bracing system. Terrill has suggested an armature system that would install a single steel pole to connect to the totem at two points from the rear. A defunct, 100-foot utility pole near Sprague Avenue and South 12th Streets could be cut in half and used for the job. (Terrill)

– Despite its spotty history, the Tacoma **Totem Pole's** story is so rich that Wright, who also teaches courses on Native American art at the University of Washington, plans to incorporate it into her class on totem poles and bring her students to visit the pole.

#### CITATION (AGLC STYLE)

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