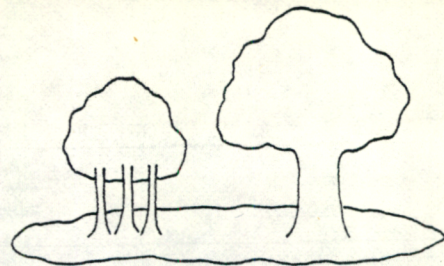


ROYALTY OAKS



OAKS REMAIN STANDING

When the Natural History Society adjourned for the summer months in May, a big concern for the members was the fate of Royalty Oaks, a mature 11 acre stand of red oak (Quercus rubra) located in East Royalty. Ironically this representative stand of the tree on our provincial emblem was in danger of replacement by a food store. At that time, an application by the owners, Food City Ltd. (a Sobey's affiliate), was before the East Royalty Village Commission requesting rezoning of the property to commercial status. Their plans called for cutting about 200 feet back into the small woodlot, an action which foresters felt would expose the remaining oaks to harsh weather unsuited to their original growth forms, and generally threaten the integrity of the stand. In short, a tree grown under sheltered conditions may not stand up too well to strong winds.

Plans for a second phase of development called for expansion of the store to extend at right angles to the Phase I development, thereby almost bisecting the remaining woods.

The stand at Royalty Oaks is one of the few remaining examples of typical red oak forest on P.E.I., and accelerated cutting of hardwoods for wood stove consumption threatens other more isolated stands. In recognition of the value of the oak stand, East Royalty village plans listed Royalty Oaks as a 'Natural Area' worthy of protection. The obvious commercial value of the property and jobs resulting from commercial development seemed highly attractive however.

In order to learn more about concerns of environmental groups, the Village Commission had private hearings with both the Island Nature Trust and the Natural History Society. Representations by these groups were also put forward to the provincial government to intervene or offer financial assistance to the Village in purchasing the property from Food City Ltd. Some letters of protest also appeared in local newspapers. At the public meeting held in East Royalty to consider the rezoning application, several groups and concerned citizens again voiced their objections. In the end the rezoning application was denied. Perhaps the best argument for its denial was the support of about 300 residents of the small village, and roughly 700 other concerned people, who agreed with petition circulator Brian Gauthier that the oaks should stand.

The message that a shopping mall is a poor substitute for a 'natural area' was taken to heart, and a surprise solution to the conundrum was announced about one month after the public hearings. The East Royalty Village Commission, with provincial assistance, arranged a deal with Food City Ltd. Land suitable for commercial development and an undisclosed sum of money was exchanged for the Royalty Oaks property. Royalty Oaks is to remain as 'parkland' and possibly some attempts to upgrade the oaks will be undertaken. At present the Village Commission has formed a committee to suggest a rational management plan for the woodlot, but to date this committee has not met.

The Natural History Society extends its appreciation to both the East Royalty Village Commission and the MacLean government for a most satisfactory solution to preserving Royalty Oaks. All too often on P.E.I., governments have done little more than posture about protecting unique natural areas. This time, financial assistance was forthcoming when needed.