

Couple Forced to Dismantle Dream Treehouse. Because Regulations.

I grew up in a home with a giant American Elm tree in the backyard. The tree was so huge that three adults had to join hands to completely encircle it.

As a child, I had grand plans for that tree, for of course it was perfect for a treehouse. And not just any treehouse, either. It was to be walled in, with a shingled roof and curtains hanging in the real glass windows. My childlike architectural renderings also included a rope ladder and a bucket on a pulley (to haul up essential supplies like cookies).

A lot of adults – at least if they grew up in a time when imagination was still a thing – would probably admit that they too had dreams of grandiose treehouses. But some are daring enough to carry those dreams into adulthood. Lynn Tran and Richard Hazen of Florida are two such individuals.

According to [WJLA](#), Tran and Hazen decided to build an elaborate treehouse on their private property on the Gulf of Mexico. After checking with the city, the couple was told they did not need a permit to build the structure. That changed, however, after the city received an anonymous complaint, and the city realized the treehouse was in an area where building is not allowed.

Since that time, the couple has racked up thousands of dollars in legal fees and fines. On Monday, they got [the final word](#): they must take their dream treehouse down.

When asked to comment on the case, city mayor Bob Johnson told [WJLA](#) that “the continued legal wrangling [is] ‘quite honestly

a waste of time.’” Seemingly puzzled by the whole thing, he went on to say, “‘For some reason these people have this fixation on it.’”

I don’t pretend to understand all of the regulations which guide city zoning laws and building permits. In all likelihood, they make perfect sense to government officials like Johnson.

What I do understand a bit better, however, is the “fixation” Tran and Hazen have on the case. In their minds, the property is theirs, they did the best they could to go through proper permission channels, and now they are suffering for it.

The odd thing is, the viewpoint of Tran and Hazen seems to align best with that of the one who is known as the Father of the Constitution. In his famous [essay on property](#), James Madison notes:

“Government is instituted to protect property of every sort; as well that which lies in the various rights of individuals, as that which the term particularly expresses. This being the end of government, that alone is a just government, which impartially secures to every man, whatever is his own.”

But as Madison goes on to explain, one cannot expect government to protect an individual’s property if that same government is oppressing its citizens with unequal taxes, excessive regulations, and the denial of various religious and political opinions. The government which does such things, Madison concludes, “is not a pattern for the United States.”

Have we left Madison’s ideal form of government? And if so, will we only continue to encounter more unfortunate cases like that of the Florida treehouse and its owners?