



NEWS RELEASE

For immediate release

Tuesday, March 1 , 2016

Contact: Bill Prokop, City Manager, 843-525-7000

Photo: The recently-pruned live oak stands tall after surrounding scrub trees were removed to improve the oak's health.

Beaufort strives to save live oak near Boundary Street construction project

As construction crews begin clearing the way for a realigned intersection of Boundary Street and Robert Smalls Parkway/SC 170, Beaufort city leaders are working to save a century-old live oak located at what will be an improved First Street.

The tree is a 51-inch diameter live oak and is likely between 100 and 150 years old, arborist Michael Murphy said.

“Live oaks are an important part of Lowcountry culture as well as Southern culture,” Murphy said. “These iconic trees have come to identify the South. Every historical Southern event seems to have happened under or near the canopy of a live oak. This tree’s location, in a prominent site on a future bend in a new road which would place it in the view of all who would be using the new road, is reason enough to preserve and maintain it.”

First Street improvements will include two 11-foot travel lanes and eight-foot on-street parking on both sides of the road beginning at the newly aligned SC 170 intersection to Hogarth Road.

When completed, US 21/Boundary Street will consist of two lanes in each direction separated by a raised and landscaped median with a sidewalk on the north shoulder and 10-foot multi-use path on the south shoulder. The intersection of Robert Smalls Parkway/SC 170 and Boundary Street will be relocated and realigned following the recent demolition of the former Butler used car building and the clearing of a lot beside Chick-fil-A.

“We recognize that we can’t save all the trees affected by this project, but when we have a chance to save a live oak, we are certainly going to try,” said David Coleman, senior project manager for the City of Beaufort.

“When this part of the road is completed, this big tree will help anchor the end of the road as it starts to bend at the river,” he said.

Murphy, hired by the city to examine the tree and recommend ways to protect it and nurture it back to health, said years of neglect took their toll on the tree.

“On trees like this, you have to look past what might seem to be obvious signs of decline. All the lower deadwood has been dead for quite some time,” he said. “Some people might look at this condition and automatically deem it a dying diseased tree.” However, much of the problem came from surrounding trees that blocked sunlight. Now that those trees and vines have been removed, the tree has room to grow again.

“We have pruned the tree and basically given it a check-up, and if it can survive the construction work, it should have decades or even centuries ahead of it,” Murphy said.

Coleman said recent conversations with the contractor and construction crews included ways to protect the tree during upcoming grading and paving. “Our first priority is to create a safer Boundary Street with better traffic flow for more vehicles, and then to be sure this important entrance to our city is visually attractive.”

END