

May 15th  
2008

"The  
Oak  
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# Road project's impact on maples studied

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Work crews used a high-pressure "air knife" this week to blow away dirt and grass from the roots of a few sugar maples along the Oak Ridge Turnpike, evaluating the health of the trees and judging the impact of a long-awaited road-widening project on the west end of the city.

The work will also help Rogers Group, the project contractor, determine where to locate utilities on the south side of the Turnpike, said Oak Ridge City Engineer Steve Byrd.

Many trees along the Turnpike have been cut down to make way for the wider road and associated utilities. Before the construction project started, state officials had agreed to try to save 56 maple trees in front of Rolling Hills Apartments just west of Illinois Avenue.

The trees are marked off with orange construction fencing.

Scott Fraker/Staff  
Jim Cortese of Cortese Tree Specialists shows the roots of a maple tree along the Oak Ridge Turnpike after the tree's dirt has been removed. Below, Cortese uses an 'air knife' to remove the dirt from around the base of the maple tree, so the condition and health of the tree can be examined.

See MAPLES, Page 24



Page  
1-A

May 15<sup>th</sup>  
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Scott Fraker/Staff

Dave Leonard, a consulting arborist from Kentucky, works on the removal of a maple tree root along Oak Ridge Turnpike.

## MAPLES:

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1A

This week, Jim Cortese, owner of Knoxville's Cortese Tree Specialists Inc., used an air gun — called a supersonic air knife — to "slice through the ground" around a sample of five trees. Though it blows out supersonic air, the 5-foot-long, aluminum air knife does not hurt roots, said consulting arborist Dave Leonard, of Lexington, Ky.

On Tuesday morning, Cortese, wearing a face shield and ear plugs, uncovered the roots of at least one tree that needs to be cut down and removed.

"Look how rotten that is," said Leonard, a root expert who pointed out a type of decay called hypoxylon canker.

Cortese said the tree had roots that were "girdling," meaning the roots had initially grown around the tree in a circular fashion and are now killing the tree.

"It literally has choked itself," Cortese said.

But the master arborist said he isn't condemning the trees. Instead, he is



Scott Fraker/Staff

Jim Cortese, left, of Cortese Tree Specialists shows a maple tree root to Steve Byrd, Oak Ridge city engineer.

giving the city a report on their health and life expectancy.

The report, which could cost an estimated \$1,800, is due June 1.

Project plans call for the widened Turnpike to include a 5-foot sidewalk that would pass near the maple trees and probably over part of their root systems.

Cortese said a sidewalk will kill roots.

It isn't yet clear what effect his report might

have on the Tennessee Department of Transportation's road-widening project in Oak Ridge. The two-year project will widen a four-mile stretch of the Oak Ridge Turnpike, or state Route 95, from Illinois Avenue to Westover Drive.

"Now that the construction has started and they're reviewing the location of underground utilities and the method of constructing those utilities, they are having

issues with many of the maple trees," Byrd said.

He said the roadway was initially going to be widened symmetrically near Rolling Hills Apartments, but the widened roadway has instead been shifted north to minimize the impact on the maples.

As part of the project, Byrd said, "The city's making a real effort to look at the trees."

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