

May 8, 2020

Dear GOCA Members and Friends,

First and foremost, we hope you are healthy and managing under the COVID-19 restrictions. Those of you working with school-aged children at home on schoolwork deserve special respect.

On behalf of GOCA, Co-Chair Patty Reed and I want to notify you of a development regarding the **300 year-old Oakton Oak Tree** located at 2911 Hunter Mill Road, a short distance from the HMR northward entrance to the Giant shopping center.

You may have noticed a large painted "X" on the tree. That "X" means that the Virginia Department of Transportation, aka VDOT, determined that the tree should be **removed** based on VDOT's arborist opinion that the tree is a safety risk. You may be aware that the Oakton Oak lost a limb last July 31, part of which fell on Hunter Mill Road.

VDOT **owns the easement on which the tree stands**. The easement is on property owned by the VanMetre Companies, which also owns the 2911 building on the property through a subsidiary corporation. VanMetre Companies told VDOT that it wishes the removal of the tree because of liability concerns after the limb fell last summer. **The tree is damaged BUT NOT DISEASED according to VDOT's arborist's report.**

Many members of the greater Oakton community have rallied in recent weeks to try to preserve the Oakton Oak. GOCA is leading the charge.

GOCA has reached out to elected officials, including Providence District Supervisor Dalia Palchik, VA Senator Chap Peterson, VA Delegate Mark Keam, and US Congressman Gerald Connolly for support of the tree's preservation. Thus far, **Supervisor Palchik and Senator Chap Peterson** have shared their support of the tree's preservation with VDOT.

VDOT, represented by Allison Richter, has been very responsive to the community's concerns by sharing its arborist's risk assessment report and by agreeing to have a second opinion on the tree. GOCA also contacted the VanMetre Companies about the Oakton Oak but to no avail as of the date of this email to you.

A bit of history about the Oakton Oak Tree:

Oakton is named after this ancient "witness" tree. Very few ancient trees remain in Fairfax County, some on the Mount Vernon estate, which have been carefully preserved over the past two centuries.

The historic significance of the Oakton "Mosby" Oak Tree is well-documented in local accounts and published articles and books as a **landmark and meeting place during the War Between the States (Civil War)**.

At that time, Oakton (then called "Flint Hill") was a small farming community caught between the Union and Confederate armies fighting for control of the north/south W&OD railroad (now the W&OD Trail). The railroad was the main supply and troop movement corridor between Washington, DC, and Maryland, where the battles of Sharpsburg and Gettysburg took place. Hunter Mill Road, which led to the railroad, is littered with historic sites of the struggle for control of this corridor. Oakton's own historian, James Lewis, has documented these sites.

In the years since then, the Oakton Oak Tree has remained the symbol of our community's identity and history. It has been the one "constant" amid rapid development and serves as a reminder of nature's perseverance and beauty as man alters the environment.

Your personal support of the Oakton Oak Tree's preservation may soon be needed. GOCA will follow up soon with you to share developments.

With gratitude,
Janet Kerr-Tener (Janet Tener), Co-Chair
Patricia Reed, Co-Chair
Greater Oakton Community Association