

Work on Oakton Road Is Planned to Avoid 200-Year-Old Oak Tree

By Maggie Locke

Washington Post, June 15, 1978

The Fairfax County hamlet of Oakton will not lose one of its champion oak trees.

Construction is underway to widen the two-lane Hunter Mill Road out to where it intersects with Rte. 123 in the county. In the path of construction, near the intersection, is an enormous oak estimated to be at least 200 years old.

Original plans to widen the road called for chopping down the oak, which grows so close to narrow Hunter Mill Road that its roots extend under the asphalt and its fanning limbs shade the pavement.

Fairfax Supervisor Martha V. Pennino (D-Centreville), thinking the tree slated for destruction, announced at last week's meeting of the Board of Supervisors that the tree should be saved - "maybe by building a divided road around it or something."

As it turns out, revised road construction plans show the new Hunters Mill Road winding west around the tree, with a guardrail separating the road's shoulder from the oak's nine-foot-high trunk.

"The fact is we aren't taking that tree down," said Guy A. Lewis, the general contractor helping to build the road with the Virginia Department of Highways and Transportation. "Some of my men were confused earlier and were talking about cutting it down, but I've set them straight."

Although the tree probably won't be felled, Lewis conceded it is possible road construction around the tree may damage its roots, which he said already may be in bad condition since pavement covers them on one side.

"All we have to do is remove the asphalt already there, and we're going to be very careful in doing that," Lewis said.

The tree has been there 200 years, so it's worth keeping even another five," said Pennino. "People are tired of destruction in the name of progress."

That the tree will stay is likely to please 81-year-old Mary Evelyn Bell, a retired attorney who lives across the street from the oak, and spends time reading on her front porch in the summer months.

"I find myself looking at that tree at least a half dozen times a day, and I thank the good Lord for it," said Bell. "We can widen roads all right, but only God can make a tree."