Saving historic oak trees in Walhalla

BY JESSICA SIBLEY
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WALHALLA — The founding fathers of Walhalla quickly agreed upon a centerpiece look for downtown when it became an established city.

Along Main Street, they called for large oak trees to be planted 50 feet apart down the center of the divided road.

Today, those same trees are in serious danger of causing damage to people and property.

Due to severe pruning over the years, to keep the sprawling branches off power lines, the oaks are dying at an increasing rate and continue to get weaker with each passing day.

Supporters and organizers of the Heritage Oaks Project aren't sitting back watching it happen, however. The Heritage Oaks Project was established to raise funds for the purpose of purchasing, planting and caring for oak trees to replace dying trees on Walhalla's Main Street, according to Jennifer Harper, supporter of the project.

Approximately 20 trees will need to be replaced over the next few years.

The severe topping of the trees in the past was done primarily to protect the power lines that ran down the center of Main Street.

Those power lines have since been buried, so severe pruning should not be necessary in the future, she added.

"Those trees are one of the things visitors remember about Walhalla," said Fay Workman, who has shown a personal interest in Walhalla's trees for many years.

As a civic project, the Blue Hills Garden Club of Walhalla has replaced eight trees over the last decade.

The trees purchased are 15-year-old willow oaks, which have been bought at a discounted price of $600 each from Merritt Brothers, who has also professionally planted the trees.

A goal of planting 10 trees during the first year of The Heritage Oaks Project has been set, pending the help of citizens from the city and county.

Trees will be planted during the fall and winter months so they will have the best chance for survival.

"At the rate the trees are dying, we realized that our club cannot fund the replacement of these trees by ourselves," said Carolyn Brandt, former president and chairman of the civic projects committee of The Blue Hills Garden Club. "We knew we would need donations from the many citizens and all those who love Walhalla," she continued, "so the idea of the Heritage Oaks Project was formed."



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Because of extensive pruning, the massive oak trees that line Walhalla's Main Street will need to be replaced. They are dying and brittle branches could fall. Money is being raised to replace these historic landmarks.

According to Jimmy Walters of the South Carolina Forestry Commission, the water oak trees in downtown Walhalla could be as old as 70 to 100 years, and if so, could likely have been planted in commemoration of the 200th anniversary of the birth of George Washington in 1932.

Over 15 million "Washington" trees were planted, and water oaks were the most common tree planted during the campaign.

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