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Project is partnership between city, New Leaf Society

[Molly McGowan/Times-News](#)

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In honor of Arbor Day, the city of Burlington will hold a celebration Friday with a ceremonial tree planting that will also kick off local agencies' efforts to restore the historic district's tree canopy.

Area homeschooled children will assist the Burlington Tree & Appearance Commission in planting a Zelkova tree in the 500 block of Fountain Place. The tree will represent an alliance formed among the commission, the Burlington Historic Preservation Commission and the New Leaf Society to begin re-establishing the trees in the historic district, particularly along Fountain Place.

The New Leaf Society is a local nonprofit agency focused on community beautification and Jeff Parsons, supervisor of the cemetery and grounds division, said, "New Leaf is interested in taking out the diseased trees and ... restoring trees back to what (they) originally (were), with a more appropriate tree." Parsons explained the trees originally planted there were sycamores. "Though they have a nice look to them, they're not what are considered a 'street tree,'" he said.

Parsons said the three groups are developing a plan detailing which trees to remove and replace, and all three parties must approve of the plan before planting — besides the Arbor Day tree — can commence. "We've never done something like this before, with two commissions and a nonprofit organization," said Parsons.

What makes it so tricky, he explained, are the different jurisdictions each commission covers. Parsons said while the Tree & Appearance Commission oversees any planting done in city rights of way, the Historic Preservation Commission has jurisdiction over historic Burlington.

Approval from both commissions is required, since the project focuses on a street in the historic area, and the plan is to plant between the sidewalk and street curb, as well as in the medians.

Though the revitalization plan is still in the approval process, Parsons said he hopes planting will begin in the fall. The tree planted on Arbor Day will be worked into the final plan, he said. "This is not going to be a seedling," Parsons said. "This is going to be a pretty good-size street tree." He said the Zelkova is a vase-shaped tree that grows up, not out, which is ideal for trees lining streets. "It's one of the newer varieties that folks are using," said Parsons.

He said there are several other Zelkova trees along Fountain Place. "It fits the space real well," he said, adding that the eventual goal is to make the area look like it did years ago. "It was a tree-lined street," he said.

The Arbor Day Celebration Program will take place 4 p.m. Friday near the Stone Entrance Gate along Fountain Place in the historic district.

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