

Addition by subtraction: Old trees come down to make room for the new on Davis Street

By Molly McGowan / Times-News

Published: Thursday, March 6, 2014 at 16:36 PM.

The medians in the center of Davis Street are getting a makeover from the New Leaf Society that will likely result in year-round visual appeal in the Burlington historic district's neighborhood but some old trees had to come down first.

Living Landscapes, contracted by New Leaf for the project, removed the 23 crape myrtle trees in the islands between Central Avenue and Front Street on Thursday, in preparation for a replanting project designed for New Leaf by Tom Flood.

While the change may come as a surprise to passersby, residents along the street were notified that the old trees were going to be replaced, said Jeff Parsons, Burlington's cemetery and grounds division superintendent.

"They were somewhat historic simply because they were that old," Parsons said, but "they were extremely weathered."

Rett Davis, president of New Leaf Society, said, "Those islands, over the past few years, have lost a lot of trees" to disease, storm damage, or even cars crashing into them.

"Some of them (were) very large, but (were) in poor health or condition, have not been blooming well because of the heavy shade from the oak trees," said Flood, who's also the director of landscaping at Elon University.

He and Parsons said that particular stretch of Davis Street was a challenging area to plan for new foliage since the large oak trees lining the street provide full shade in some areas, while other spots are fully exposed to sunlight.

It's in one of those latter sunny spots that three of the biggest and oldest original crape myrtles have thrived, and are thus remaining in the island nearest Central Avenue, Parsons said.

The rest of the islands are going to be filled with 50 to 60 trees, including "rising sun" redbud trees, which will bloom in both sun and shade, and have "highly ornamental leaves that change color through the season," Flood said.

Each island also will get its share of small butterfly bush, azaleas, knockout roses and other shrubs and perennial plantings, said Flood, adding that all the plants are low maintenance.

He said the variety of plants will provide "year-round interest," with spring and summer flowers, fall colors and evergreens in the winter.

"It's going to have a lot of the same look that Fountain Place has," Parsons said, referring to the neighborhood replanting project New Leaf tackled two years ago. "It is a gift to the city whenever New Leaf does a project."

Davis said the roughly \$13,000 project is just that — a gift to the city — after New Leaf maintains the plantings by pruning, mulching and guaranteeing their survival for the first two years. From that point, the city will assume the maintenance responsibility of the trees and foliage.

"It's a very nice public/private partnership," Parsons said.