

# Gwinnett Daily Post

Gwinnett County, Georgia

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### State DOT spares giant oak tree on Pleasant Hill Road

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A highly visible oak tree towering over Pleasant Hill Road at Interstate 85 has been saved by the state Department of Transportation

DULUTH — Consider it an 11th-hour reprieve for a longtime Gwinnett County resident.

On Tuesday, the state Department of

Transportation decided it will save a massive oak tree where Pleasant Hill Road meets Interstate 85.

The verdict came after a group of Gwinnett Place business owners asked the DOT to spare the tree when new lanes are installed beside I-85 this summer.

The Southern red oak whose trunk is seemingly as big as a Mini Cooper automobile looms between a cemetery and a ramp that lets motorists access I-85 north from Pleasant Hill Road.

The sprawling tree stands in marked contrast to the jumble of restaurants, shopping centers and busy roads that have sprung up around it.

Dave Rosselle, executive director of the Gwinnett Place Community Improvement District, said he was told Tuesday afternoon the roughly 80-foot-tall tree can stay.

"I would have been happy if they had saved half of it, so this is a tremendous victory," said Rosselle, who was told by the DOT on Monday the tree was a goner.

The tree has the appearance of two large trees sharing one massive trunk, and the DOT said Monday it would have to be removed because its limbs would overhang the new lanes and create a safety hazard, Rosselle said.

After visiting the tree before daylight Tuesday morning, Rosselle made transportation officials an offer. If the DOT removed only the half of the tree closest to the interstate and the other half later became unhealthy and in danger of falling, the Gwinnett Place district would pay for its removal.

On Tuesday afternoon, the DOT project manager overseeing the

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road construction visited the tree, checked the project maps and decided the tree could remain. The limbs closest to the future lanes will have to be removed, though.

"Thank God. What a blessing," Carolyn Way, vice president of White Chapel Memorial Gardens, said Tuesday afternoon when told of the DOT's decision.

Way was distraught and angered Tuesday morning to learn the tree was slated for removal. She said it helps buffer sound from the interstate, not to mention adds to the aesthetics of the 15-acre cemetery.

Steve Pettis, Gwinnett County's agricultural extension agent, said Southern red oaks are common in Georgia and are found throughout the Southeast. "They're pretty tough," he said.

The new lanes beside Interstate 85 are part of a \$150 million project that will overhaul the I-85/Ga. Highway 316 interchange. They will let motorists hop between Pleasant Hill Road and Ga. 316 without merging onto the interstate.

The Gwinnett Place Community Improvement District is composed of commercial property owners who tax themselves and use the revenue to fund area upgrades, like landscaping and litter removal.

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