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Residents weep over cut willows

Four large willow trees removed along S.R. 224 during construction project

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Four large willow trees along State Road 224 were cut down to make way for a new Montessori school, angering neighbors who say the trees should have been saved.

According to Bruce King, Soaring Wings International Montessori School administrator, the trees were removed because they posed a safety risk to the students, not to make way for a driveway or building pad.

"Our original plan was to keep the willow trees along our driveway," King said. "As we began to build, we became concerned about the safety risk associated with the trees. A large branch breaks off of one of the trees every winter and we didn't want it falling on a student or parent."

The new school is being built at the intersection of S.R. 224 and Old Ranch Road and has been under construction for the past three months. The school is scheduled to open in September 2013.

King said the contractor had a state-certified master gardener come out to inspect the trees and found that they were fragile and weak due to an infection inside of the tree called Verticillium Wilt that could not be treated.

"There was no way to make the trees safe," he said. "Our building is much further back. We only removed them due to safety and really didn't want to cut them down."

King added that the trees were planted in the 1960's by the Bloom family who used to live on the property.

"Willow trees only have a life-span of around 50 years so they were near the end of their life anyways," he said.

Snyderville Basin Planning Commissioner Colin DeFord said he became concerned about the tree removal because of public feedback and wants to know if the trees could have been saved.

"People are outraged about this and I think it is a good opportunity for people to become aware of the planning process and start coming to meetings and giving us feedback so we can save other trees throughout the Basin," DeFord said. "People are confused about why this is happening and there is a lack of information being given out by the Montessori School on the reason behind this. It seems like they were cut down for no reason."

King said if residents had contacted him, he would have been able to explain the reason the trees were cut down.

"People just got angry and we received multiple Facebook posts about it," he said. "If they had called we could have had a civil discussion on why it was happening."

King added that the construction project and "elaborate" landscaping that is planned for the school has been approved by Summit County.