

Tree conflicts

by Kyle Coverdale, Climbing Arborist for the City of Asheville

There are many conflicts for trees in and around our urban areas. Sidewalks, roadways, and power lines are the first to come to my mind. These three conflicts are the most discussed. There are other conflicts, too, but let's start with the most common three.



Sidewalks

When trees are planted near or around sidewalks, they are put there for societal benefits. Trees provide shade, absorb stormwater, and offset carbon emissions. These trees also beautify the community. During the process of maturation, these trees grow taller and wider, both above and below the ground. As the roots increase in size, they force sidewalks to raise or heave. This is when the conflict becomes noticed among each passerby. Typically, arborists will remove the trees and grind both the stumps and roots before municipal staff repair the sidewalk.

Roadways

Regarding roadways, tree roots can alter road conditions in the same manner they do among sidewalks. Tree canopies next to roads also pose conflicts with people. Tree limbs and leaves can grow over roadways to the point they collide with passing vehicles. To prevent damage to cars and trucks and ensure motorists have an unobstructed roadway, arborists will remove individual limbs or an entire tree. So once again, these trees are being sacrificed because we cannot shut down the roadways to accommodate the expansive growth of trees.

Power lines

Power lines are a third source of conflict on my list. We all need our electrical power for coffee, lights, hot water, etc. When trees grow into the power lines, the possibility of power disruption increases. Similarly, when a tree falls during a storm, or for any reason, the falling tree may hit and dismantle power lines. In turn, people lose electricity for minutes, hours or days until the lines are repaired. Here we go again; conflict, with us cutting down the problematic tree, right?

Property lines

The final conflict to mention exists between trees and property lines, or I should say property owners. Neighbors may dispute who is at fault for property damage

due to a fallen tree. For instance, consider a garden that a woman established many years ago on her property. Her next door neighbor nurtures an oak tree on his property. As the mighty oak grows, so do its limbs, which reach increasingly more into the gardener's yard with each passing year. Eventually, the oak's canopy is broad enough to restrict the flow of sunlight into the gardener's yard, thereby decreasing the garden's productivity.

How should we resolve this conflict? Hmm. There is a symposium about this type of conflict (and many others) on 16 June 2023. Be sure to register for the [Southeast Trees and the Law Symposium](#) at the McKimmon Center in Raleigh!