Oak trees in peril due to SR26 safety project

By Nick Baptista/ The Valley Springs News/ September 3, 2014

Traffic passes by the three oaks due to be cut near the intersection of State Route 26 and St. Andrews Road.

Three oak trees between the Thomas Center and State Route 26 near the intersection at St. Andrews Road are destined to be "slaughtered" as Caltrans moves forward with a project to improve roadway safety in the area.

Valley Springs attorney Joe Bechelli, whose office is located in the Thomas Center, is upset with the anticipated demise of the elderly oaks and has called Caltrans' plan an "oak tree slaughter."

From the windows of his office, Bechelli can see the oaks he's fond of.

"There does not seem to be any real need for that," Bechelli said, "even assuming they have to widen the road. There is plenty of land on the other side of Highway 26."

Across State Route 26, Tony Lallo of Lallo's Automotive said he's been informed by Caltrans that they don't plan to cut any of the trees on his side, but the widened roadway will come close to a few.

Survey crews have been busy in the area the past few months preparing for the project, with an anticipated construction date of the summer of 2016.

Plans call for three intersections along State Route 26 to be addressed. The safety upgrades will be at the SR 26 intersections with Vista Del Lago Drive, St. Andrews Road and Country View Drive. Vista Del Lago will receive a traffic signal, while left turn lanes and wider shoulders are projected for the St. Andrews and Country View intersections.

Dave Zamora of Zamora's Auto Body and Glass sees about five to six auto accidents a year along the stretch of State Route 26 between his business at Country View Drive and St. Andrews Road.

"And that's just when I'm here," Zamora said, "it doesn't include at night."

His father and an employee have been involved in accidents along the dangerous stretch of the road.

The Valley Springs News was waiting for a response from Caltrans about possible removal of the trees.