

Protest of removal of trees sparks debate

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TREES

Zoom

A crew from AAA Tree Service and Stump Grinding, work on cutting down the trees along State Street, outside of US Bank, on Thursday. / TIMOTHY J. GONZALEZ / Statesman

Tree removal

U.S. Bank officials petitioned the city for a permit to remove five trees along State Street. The bank maintained the trees obstructed the view of a historic building and were causing the sidewalks

outside the bank to heave up.

An act of civil disobedience has Salem residents talking about the value of iconic street trees versus the demands of a downtown business.

David Rosales, the owner of La Capitale and Bar and Andaluz, was arrested Friday by Salem Police. He faces charges of trespassing, disorderly conduct and criminal mischief after a confrontation with U.S. Bank employees over the removal of trees outside of the bank's historic Ladd and Bush branch at 302 State St.

"I would like to see people pay more attention to our town and the beauty here," Rosales said Monday. The restaurant owner said he was "sick of the old way" decisions have been made in the city where he grew up.

Rosales declined to discuss details of his arrest, but a statement published on La Capitale's Facebook page indicates he was intent on taking a stand.

Three trees were removed by Thursday, and two more trees are scheduled to come down

On Friday, Rosales was accused of screaming at bank employees and pushing over a 100-year-old table. He was taken into custody.

Rosales quickly found supporters on social media. Brian Hines wrote on his blog: "Way to go U.S. Bank. Horrible, PR, marketing decision."

Claudia Howells, another Salem resident who wanted the trees spared, said the situation is frustrating. The city's shade tree committee had made a recommendation against removing the trees.

"You go through the appropriate process and it doesn't make any difference," Howells said.

Salem resident Mark Wigg said the trees were sacrificed without a good explanation.

"I haven't heard a straight line from these people yet," Wigg said of his discussions with U.S. Bank.

U.S. Bank officials maintain the Japanese Zelkovas' roots were causing the sidewalk to buckle, creating a safety hazard.

"Safety was our first and foremost concern," said Teri Charest, a spokeswoman for U.S. Bank.

Salem City Councilor Laura Tesler said U.S. Bank "exploited a loophole" in city code having to do with the obscurement of historic buildings.

“The city did not want to cut those trees,” Tesler said.

U.S. Bank, however, had the city code on its side. Salem had little choice but to allow the cutting, Tesler said.

The city councilor said she doesn't understand why the bank didn't chose to prune the trees rather than opting for “a clear cut.”

If the condition of the sidewalk was unsafe, the city would have issued an order to cut the trees, Tesler said. Instead, it was the bank that petitioned to have the trees removed.

The city councilor said she sympathizes with Rosales' concerns.

“David Rosales is a really calm guy,” Tesler said. “David Rosales is not a person who gets upset and flies off the handle.”