



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Clear-Cut Isn't a Clean Cut: Alliance for Cape Fear Trees Responds to Galleria Tree Loss

Wilmington, NC, June 10, 2025 — The Alliance for Cape Fear Trees (ACFT) is heartbroken and deeply concerned by the recent loss of mature live oaks at the Galleria development site on Wrightsville Avenue. These were not just trees—they were legacy canopy that shaped our sense of place, anchored biodiversity, cooled our neighborhoods, and offered generations of shade, shelter, and stormwater protection. This loss is not just aesthetic—it is ecological, cultural, and communal.

Mature trees like those felled at the Galleria site are vital infrastructure. They clean our air, absorb millions of gallons of stormwater, reduce urban heat, lower crime rates, and improve public health outcomes. And they take decades—if not centuries—to grow.

A replanting plan that includes young trees, even at double or triple the number, is no substitute. “Replacing healthy, mature native trees with immature saplings—regardless of planting quantity—is not an equal trade,” said ACFT Board Vice President Laura McCabe, who also chairs ACFT’s advocacy committee. “It’s like bulldozing a historic building and offering a blueprint in return.”

CONVENIENCE OVER CANOPY

The justification offered for these removals points to the location of underground utility lines and new sidewalks. But this isn’t a new challenge—it’s one that communities solve every day when preservation is prioritized.

“Too often, developers treat mature trees as expendable obstacles,” said Isabelle Shepherd, ACFT Executive Director. “But with thoughtful site design, creative engineering, and early planning, infrastructure can—and should—coexist with legacy canopy.”

The City’s updated development code includes stronger tree protections, but the Galleria project was approved by-right under the older version—before those safeguards were in place. This highlights the urgent need for vigilance and advocacy. We support the City’s decision to issue a stop-work order, and we call on all developers to partner with our community—not clear-cut through it.

“We understand development is inevitable, but it must be responsible, sustainable, and collaborative,” said Margee Herring, ACFT Board President. “We’re grateful that Wilmington’s updated codes now offer stronger protections for trees. Still, we urge developers with grandfathered plans to rise to today’s higher standards—not just because they have to, but because our community and environment deserve nothing less.”

Wilmington’s tree canopy has already declined from 48% to 41% in less than a decade, according to the City of Wilmington’s Urban Tree Canopy Report and Tree Equity Score. We urge Wilmington’s residents, leaders, and developers to view our urban forest as the critical infrastructure it is. Trees are not obstacles—they are assets.

For more information on the Alliance’s other tree planting, preservation, and advocacy initiatives, visit acftrees.org.

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