

STATE COLLEGE BOROUGH

Reducing Tree/Sidewalk Conflicts

Natural, vigorous growth of healthy street tree roots occasionally brings them into conflict with a community's need for flat, uniform sidewalks. Expanding roots can raise and crack pavements causing residents to pay for repairs. Several options exist to minimize recurrence of this situation.

Future tree/sidewalk conflicts can be avoided at the time of tree planting by careful consideration of tree species characteristics, width of planting space and soil conditions (planting the right tree in the right place). But, once a problem exists, the solutions are more limited and expensive.

One of the most common "solutions" to this conflict is to remove the damaged sidewalk blocks, chop off all or a portion of the offending roots and then replace the sidewalk. This "solution" is only a quick fix at best and usually necessitates repair again within a few years. More importantly, however the severe damage done to the tree roots may result in unhealthy and potentially hazardous street trees. For that reason, the Borough's tree ordinance requires owners to consult with the Borough Arborist whenever roots larger than 2 inches are encountered.

More appropriate alternatives include using cutouts in the sidewalk (Figure 1), constructing by-pass walks back onto private property (Figure 2), installing root barriers (Figure 3), altering base materials or concrete thickness, or bridging troublesome roots. For more information on these techniques and others, ask your contractor or Borough Public Works officials at 234-7140.

