

**Minutes of the Norwich Conservation Commission (NCC) – Special Meeting
Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) Site Visit by VT Urban and Community Forestry Program
Tracy Hall, Norwich, VT
6/20/2024, 1:00-4:45 pm**

NCC members present: Craig Layne, Lynnwood Andrews, Lindsay Putnam, Alex Gottlieb, Cody Williams (and 3 month-old Lewis)

UCFP staff: Adam McCullough (Urban Forester), Tate Mullin (summer intern)

Others present: Matt Hall (Norwich Tree Warden), Doug Hardy, David Hubbard, Brennan Duffy (Town Manager), Pam Smith (Selectboard member), Chrissy Morley, Philip Ellar, Carly Kimball

The meeting began with introductions and an overview by Adam McCullough of the benefits of trees to society in general, EAB's overall impacts to ash trees, and the specific damage that EAB causes. Adam emphasized that he takes a practical perspective on EAB management.

David Hubbard made the convincing point that EAB is effectively a tsunami bearing down on Norwich, with enormous consequences for us. His forestry experience suggests that the Town will need to plan for costs likely in the hundreds of thousands of dollars, or possibly more. Adam added that the longer we wait on intervention, the greater the costs will be. This is a very big issue for Norwich.

We discussed inoculations as a preventive measure to protect high-value trees. Chrissy Morley asked whether community members could be trained to do inoculations, as a much-cheaper alternative to having certified professional arborists treat ash trees. Adam replied that they would have to pass a certification test (which costs \$50-70) with an official "shade tree endorsement", and that an investment of ~\$3000 in equipment would have to be made. The chemical itself, of which emamectin benzoate is the preferred choice (lowest safety risk and most effective), costs ~\$5 per inch of diameter at breast height (DBH). Treating trees in this way could be an option for Norwich, but most towns go the professional route for treatment, which generally costs \$15-20 per inch of DBH. Several Norwich landowners are already inoculating selected ash trees on their property, and have been for several years. Because early infestations are difficult to confirm, Adam recommended doing at least one treatment of any trees deemed valuable; although they may still die if already infested; this approach potentially saves the tree and can be significantly less costly than removal.

Among the group, there was uncertainty about who bears responsibility (i.e. pays) for cutting and removing EAB-infested trees that are in the public right of way (ROW) – the landowner whose property borders the road and therefore legally owns the trees, or the Town. To resolve this, our group is consulting abundant material on the matter published by the Vermont UCF Program, the Vermont Institute for Government, and other sources.

In response to a question about how best to keep the EAB planning process moving forward in Norwich, Adam recommended that we maintain our core group and establish a standing time to meet, perhaps every other week at this point., That will ensure better coordination, more regular

follow-up, etc. He mentioned that not necessarily every group member needs to be present for every meeting, or that minutes of every meeting be reported to the TM and SB. He is confident that volunteers (which we all are!) can accomplish much of the work remaining to be done.

There were a number of insightful questions asked by TM Brennan Duffy and others, which Adam and Tate answered and which generated good discussion. One involved disposal and storage of ash trees that are felled, whether preemptively or because they are infested. There is no clear solution to this issue at present, and it will be an important element of a draft management plan for the SB's consideration.

We concluded the indoor portion of the meeting by discussing an ash inventory, which Adam believes is Norwich's most important next step, especially of those trees in and around the village. The most critical trees to inventory are those that pose a safety risk to public "targets", defined as persons, structures, and vehicles, but not powerlines or roads. It is also important to inventory any trees that might be considered "high value" in terms of their aesthetic, cultural, historical, or shade attributes. Bigger trees in more public, tight spaces pose the biggest risk. If there is no nearby target, there is no risk. Ash trees smaller than 5-6" DBH should not be inventoried.

Tate and Adam then together explained the UCFP ash inventory tool that can be used on a tablet or a mobile phone. It is an ArcGIS-based program and fairly simple to use in the field. They recommend that one person effectively coordinate the townwide inventory, so that participants can be well organized and the inventoring maximally efficient. They further recommend that the core group spearheading this planning effort meet on a regular "standing" basis for consistency and assurance of follow-up, etc.

We then took several tablets outside and visited a number of ash trees in the village to inventory them. We started at the very unhealthy tree at 17 Elm Street, which is in advanced stages of EAB infestation. We noted all the classic signs of infestation, including fresh D-shaped exit holes and 2 copulating adult beetles on the lower trunk (photographed and entered on iNaturalist). We inventoried this tree, then moved to the town green, where we inspected the 3 white ash near the bandstand and the stately white ash (the "owl tree") in front of the Marion Cross School (MCS). We inventoried 3 of these and will add the 4th in the near future. We also examined and inventoried the large white ash behind the school. All these trees look quite healthy now and show no signs of EAB infestation, but are certain to be infested soon via the close-by emerging adult beetles. We also visited Philip Ellar's residence at 50 Church Street, which has a number of medium to large ash trees that are all in various stages of poor health; several provided an illustration of the exceedingly difficult removal process once they die. We inventoried two trees at this property and will add the others soon. While Adam and Tate were not able to conclusively confirm that these trees are infested with EAB, they strongly suspected them to be, and we indicated on the inventory tool that they are.

Adam and Tate will send us a pdf of the inventory tool instructions, so that we can train others in using this tool. The meeting and training concluded at 4:45 pm.