

**Minutes of special agenda meeting of the Norwich Conservation Commission
Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) Management Group
24 September 2024, 7 pm
Norwich Historical Society, with a Zoom option**

Members present: Chris Rimmer, Doug Hardy, Lindsay Putnam, David Hubbard, Matt Hall, and Peg Merrens

Attending via Zoom: Alex Gottlieb, Jonathan Frishstick, Craig Layne, Chrissy Morley

Members of the public: none

No public comment

No additional agenda items; moved the election of officers to first item on the agenda.

Elections: The group moved and unanimously approved and elected Chris Rimmer as Chair of the EAB group; Doug Hardy as Vice Chair, and Lindsey Putnam as Secretary.

General Updates on the Vermont Municipal Tree Inventory:

Chris Rimmer provided an update on the ash inventory in Norwich — 600 or so trees have been inventoried to date. This year's inventory is effectively over, due to the seasonal loss of leaves and difficulty of assessing canopy health; the group was encouraged to continue to identify at-risk trees, if they are able. The group has largely focused on inventorying trees in the town right-of way (ROW) and public spaces, but some high-risk trees outside of and prone to falling in the ROW have also been selectively inventoried. The original purpose of the VT Municipal Tree Inventory was to classify all ash within the town ROWs *prior* to the onset of EAB infestations, but Norwich began its inventory *after* EAB was established.

Chris reported that the inventory effort has recently evolved to focus on trees posing the greatest risk to public safety. After discussions with Tree Warden Matt Hall, it was decided that the highest-risk trees and those requiring urgent removal should be mapped and marked immediately. Trees are being marked with tree-marking paint in two schemes: a single red diagonal stripe indicates a high-risk tree that should be taken down as soon as feasible, while a red diagonal stripe with a smaller blue stripe above indicates an extreme-risk tree that requires immediate removal. David Hubbard encouraged Matt and others to think about using a specific blue paint that is a forestry industry standard to mark trees for removal. Doug Hardy reported that ~100 trees have so far been mapped, photographed, and marked using this two-level classification scheme. Doug has created an online Google map of all marked ash trees, with spatially referenced photos; this map will allow the public and Selectboard to view the extent of Norwich's EAB infestation and the danger posed by these trees. It will also be very useful for planning and prioritizing removals. Some high-risk trees are close to power lines and will need to be removed by the power company or an electrically-qualified contractor. Doug has a contact at Green Mountain Power (GMP) who will consider any information on trees in the GMP ROW. There was general consensus to prioritize mapping and marking on Norwich's most heavily traveled routes (such as the

Elm-Hopson-Beaver Meadow walking loop, Union Village Road, New Boston Road, and Beaver Meadow Road).

Lindsey Putnam was curious if the collected inventory data have shown any trends, such as pockets of infested trees. Alex Gottlieb conducted a preliminary summary analysis and reported that there are no obvious hotspots in town, but the data will be important to quantify ash density along roadways in town. When more of the road inventories are completed (Hopson Road and lower Beaver Meadow Road are virtually complete), Alex will redo his analysis, and a density picture will become more clear. Nonetheless, existing observations clearly reveal that EAB has infested the majority of ash trees throughout Norwich.

Action Plan: Next Steps for Presenting to Town Manager and Selectboard

There was discussion about next steps for sharing information with the Town Manager and to what degree the Selectboard is already aware of these issues. At least two Selectboard members attended the September 21 Community Day Fair and asked questions about EAB extent, inventorying, and plans for tree removal. Chris Rimmer wondered about the best approach for presenting a plan to the Selectboard. According to Matt Hall, there are limited funds in this year's budget for tree removal. At the very least, a plan for removing the highest risk, highest priority trees should be presented. Chrissy Morley emphasized the importance of taking down trees sooner than later — it is well documented that such an approach costs far less in the long run. David Hubbard suggested looking at school bus routes as one criterion to prioritize removals and to enumerate the risks of not taking action, including risk of harm and potential liability on the town's part.

Chris Rimmer feels we need to present a succinct plan to the Selectboard early in its fiscal year budgeting process. This is the time of year when the Selectboard is discussing next year's town budget. A warrant article may be necessary, asking citizens to set aside a significant amount of money for tree removal. Chris pledged that the group will continue to explore external funding options such as grants to help with the effort. Chris offered to take the lead on drafting a plan for presentation to the Selectboard.

Public Outreach Needs and Actions:

Doug reported on last weekend's Community Day Fair tabling event and discussions with attendees. Some people came by to see the tree samples that Doug had collected and were interested in learning about EAB. Chrissy Morley is using the same samples working with small groups of students at MCS, and will share with them the EAB handout we distributed at the Community Day Fair. Chrissy is hoping that some of this information will be included in individual newsletters that teachers send out with their students on Fridays. She also asked if the group might consider hosting an ecology night for families — similar to VCE's popular Suds and Science program, but for kids and parents — to present information on EAB. The group discussed the need to get handouts into landowner hands and that neighborhood canvassing may be a valuable means of outreach. Regular listserv posts need to continue.

Other Discussion:

There was discussion about the expense of inoculating trees versus removing them. In Vermont, one needs to be certified to inoculate trees. Chrissy Morley wondered if some of the group might consider getting certified. There is an upcoming training and certification course at the Fireside Inn. EABMG members would likely be required by Vermont to obtain a Government Pesticide Applicator Certificate in category 3A.

Chris Rimmer pointed out that a number of trees in Norwich's town parks (e.g., Huntley and Foley) and at the Transfer and Recycling Center may be good candidates for inoculation. This would require municipal funds that would likely amount to thousands of dollars).

Adjourned at 8:30.

Submitted by Peg Merrens