

# VERMONT URBAN AND COMMUNITY FORESTRY PROGRAM

## EAB Municipal Management Case Study

East Montpelier, Vermont

### APPROACH

*Conducting a Pilot Study for Community Engagement and Cost Estimate*

### SUMMARY

In July 2017, the East Montpelier Select board created a nine-member Resilient Roads Committee (RRC or Committee). The Committee includes the town's tree warden, road foreman, a select board member, and three members of the Planning Commission. The Committee worked with Joanne Garton of Vermont's Urban and Community Forestry Program (UCF), to develop a [Rural Road Resilient Right-of-Ways Vegetation Assessment](#). The initial purpose of the assessment was to develop a plan for the treatment of the town's roadside vegetation to help reduce runoff of water and contaminants into streams and rivers. The study also examined minimizing invasive plant species, encouraging traffic calming, and enhancing roadside character. As the committee's report was being developed in the winter of 2018, members learned that the emerald ash borer (EAB) had been found in two neighboring towns. Following the completion of the vegetation assessment, the RRC was reconvened and charged with developing a plan for addressing EAB.

RRC members, along with other volunteers, inventoried the ash trees over 6-inches in diameter at breast height (DBH) within the right-of-way on all town roads. They collected data on tree location, diameter, condition, and whether the tree fell within a utility right of way. Then, with assistance from UCF staff and the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission, they drafted a plan for managing their public ash trees. Their goal was to

use a preemptive strategy, removing ash along rural roadways before the trees started to die.

In 2020, the town applied for and received a \$15,000 grant from UCF to conduct a pilot project to remove 160 trees on the campus of the consolidated middle and high school, and along the highly trafficked nearby roads. Conducting a pilot project would provide the committee with information about costs, contractors, and overall management of tree removals elsewhere in town. The school site was chosen in part because it would serve to inform and engage a significant number of residents about EAB management. With the help of the town administrator and following the [Vermont tree warden statute, Title 24 V.S.A.](#) the committee held a public hearing about the project at the high school. After receiving support from the school community and others, they put the project out to bid and received four bids ranging from \$13,500 to \$40,000<sup>1</sup>. The contract went to the lowest bidder for removal of 160 trees. The town administrator sent letters to all property owners who had trees in the town right-of-way destined to be cut; the mailing included an agreement form for the landowners to specify details such as property access and the placement of logs, wood chips, and brush.

<sup>1</sup>All bids were for the same amount of work. The project lead hypothesized that perhaps the company putting in the high bid already had plenty of work and did not need the job.

## FAST FACTS

**Population:** 2,576

**Miles of Town Maintained Roads:** 62

**Number of Ash Inventoried on Town Roads prior to Removals:** 2,480 in public right-of-way, 216 in utility ROW.

**Normal Management of Public Trees:** Tree warden and road crew address hazard trees on a case-by-case basis.

**Active Tree Board or Conservation Commission:** Three-person Tree Board; nine-member Resilient Roads Committee (RRC) formed in 2017.

**Local Tree Ordinance:** None.

**Ash Inventory Conducted:** 2019 pen and paper inventory conducted by tree warden and selectman.

**EAB First Detected:** EAB has not yet been detected in East Montpelier. It has been confirmed in neighboring towns so the likelihood of EAB presence in East Montpelier is high.

**Written EAB Management Plan:** Drafted in 2019 with help from Regional Planning Commission; adopted interim plan for 2020 for pilot project.

**Ash Management Status in 2020:** Conducted pilot project in 2020 by removing 160 ash on the school

campus and nearby roads. Will base final management plan and budget for remaining trees on the pilot project.

**Key Players:** Resilient Roads Committee: (Tree Warden, Road Foreman, select board member, three members of the Planning Commission); Town Administrator; VT Urban and Community Forestry Program and Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission; Staff and Students from U-32 High School; Local Electric Companies; volunteers from Vermont Master Naturalist program.

**Funding:** \$15,000 grant from the Vermont Urban and Community Forestry Program for pilot project (matched by \$15,000 of in-kind/donations); Committee advised the Town to consider allocating \$25,000 per year for 10 years from General Funds for remaining 2,470 trees for a total of \$250,000.

**Wood Utilization:** Written landowner agreements allowed landowners to designate whether they wanted wood from the removals. Where landowners chose not to retain the wood, the contractor had the right under the contract to make commercial use of the wood. Most landowners retained the wood. The contractor disposed of the remaining wood at a local compost facility.

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*Ash lining road to be removed in pilot*



*Ash removed from school property*

## COST OF PILOT PROJECT AND ESTIMATED COSTS FOR REMAINING TREES

Based on their experience with the pilot project, the committee submitted to the town treasurer a suggested ash removal budget of \$25,000 for each of the next 10 years. The committee expects that the road crew will also have to remove small diameter ash trees on a continuing basis.

Activity	Pilot Project	Pilot Work Done By	Estimate <sup>1</sup>	Remaining Work Done By
<b>Treatment</b>	N/A	N/A	6	City of Montpelier arborist at cost (\$3 \$6 per DBH)
<b>Removal</b>	160 trees at \$84 per tree, \$13,500 for project	N/A	Estimating \$100 per tree 250 trees at \$25,000 per year for 10 years	Contractor
<b>Replanting: Cost of Trees</b>	Only 4 – 8 trees on school campus will be replanted at 2-2.5" caliper, approx. \$500 per tree (trees may be donated)	N/A	N/A	N/A
<b>Replanting: Cost of Labor</b>	N/A	Volunteer Landscape professional with help from school staff and students	N/A	N/A
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>\$250,000 for removing 2,470 trees over 10 years</b>			

<sup>1</sup>Estimate based on pilot project conducted during spring-summer 2020, for remaining 2,470 trees.

## ON THE GROUND

*The Resilient Road Committee wanted to conduct a pilot project to see how the public would react to the removal of ash trees [before the arrival of EAB in town]. We thought that the school campus would be a good showcase location. It is a public property with easy access for tree removal. There was a public safety concern because of the students and it would provide a benefit to the school. The road to the school is highly trafficked and many of the ash trees along the road were already sickly. The plan for the pilot was to cut all the ash trees on three roads and around the school - this would allow us to continue public outreach, gather more information about costs, and finalize our plan in the following year.*

**Jeff Cueto, Chair, East Montpelier Resilient Roads Committee**

## LESSONS LEARNED

- **Start a committee or task force as soon as possible with a core group of interested people.** It takes effort to pull everything together. There are many choices to make about your approach.
- **Learn from and share with other towns.** The RCC reached out to Charlotte, Vermont about their experience with preemptive approach. Charlotte gave the RCC a copy of their contract with their tree removal company to use as basis for the East Montpelier contract. East Montpelier is exploring if the Montpelier City Arborist can do insecticide treatments on their trees, and the RCC members communicate closely with the committee in the neighboring town of Calais working on EAB.
- **Put information on the town website.** The RCC posted a link to the Regional Planning Commission's interactive map with an ash-tree layer, meeting minutes, and links to information on EAB. Having that as a reference was very useful.
- **Figure out what makes sense for your community.** We have a small percentage of potentially hazardous trees now, but it would have been more expensive to manage them selectively. We felt we would save on economies of scale to have all the trees removed from one location at once.
- **Give residents plenty of advance notice.** Our experience with the pilot in terms of public hearings and notifying landowners has been positive. Landowners have been very cooperative. We reached out to all of them individually with information about the removals and treatments and we offered them the wood and chips from trees removed from their property. We drafted an agreement form and the Town Administrator sent it to each landowner to return. We wanted to be able to work out any issues ahead of time and well before putting the project out to bid. There have been no complaints so far.

### Vermont Urban & Community Forestry Program

Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation in partnership with University of Vermont Extension

