

Emerald Ash Borer starts showing "obvious" damage

By Brock Weir

At the beginning of the year, evidence of the invasive emerald ash borer in Aurora was limited to little more than a handful of bugs collected in specially designed traps.

This summer and fall, however, their damage ?became obvious for the first time?, according to Parks and Recreation Director Al Downey.

The emerald ash borer beetle is expected to devastate most, if not all, ash trees in the Town of Aurora within the next decade. Aurora, however, is continuing with a program to treat the ashes lining Aurora's streets with Treeazin.

?Council gave us approval to award a tender this June to Greenlawn,? said Mr. Downey. ?It is a four year contract and it will provide treatments to candidate trees per year. We have already done one [treatment] in July for 900 trees and we're doing a second round that will commence in the early summer of 2014 and that is estimated at 1,000 trees.

?We are now seeing evidence of infestation and it is becoming a little more prevalent.?

Councillors, he added, are expected to be asked to consider additional funding for the emerald ash borer program in this year's budget talks, which kick off at the start of November.

Although Council voted to allow residents to go to the Town to arrange for chemical treatment of their ash trees at the same price the Town enjoys under the contract, interest from residents was initially healthy over the summer, but has since tapered off.

But, for some environmentally-minded residents, moving ahead with cost-effective tree treatments for Aurora's street trees, a shift in gears after Council's initial plan to let the emerald ash borer do its expected damage and replacing the trees as needed, was a step in the right direction.

?It started off as ?we can't afford this, let the poor buggers die,' and now we saw that it wasn't that expensive [to treat],? said Gordon Barnes, a member of Aurora's Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee (PRAC) and active volunteer with the Aurora Community Arboretum. ?It's a combination of aesthetics and the kind of trauma that would happen on a street that was otherwise full of ash trees.?

John Clement, a fellow committee member and volunteer, however, said he would like to see the tree treatment program expanded just a little bit further to include select parks trees.

?There are some significant ash trees within the park system,? said Mr. Clement. ?There are a half-dozen trees that have been flagged in the arboretum with a request they be treated. They were not treated this last year. Some of these are commemorative trees that have been purchase by somebody making the donation to the Town to install this tree and people have a vested emotion built up with the tree.

?If we leave these trees unprotected when there is a protection available and 600 trees being protected, I would think if I were the sponsor of one of those trees, I would feel rather disappointed. I would encourage specifically that some of these commemorative trees be given a priority in the next round of treatments.?

This was an idea that gained traction at last week's PRAC meeting. Mr. Downey told members that he would investigate, particularly through the upcoming budget, what funds would be available to expand it to the handful of commemorative ash trees in the arboretum and a report could come their way on ?what efforts need to be taken to make that happen.?

PRAC chair Chris Ballard also suggested ash trees of a specific age in Aurora parks and the Arboretum should also be considered for treatment.

?If there are a half dozen [significant] ones in other parks, it might be worth looking at,? he said.

Added Mr. Clement: ?There is a limited number of [commemorative] trees and certainly Town finances should not be stretched to cover every ash tree [in parks]. As a taxpayer, I don't want to do that.?