

Grant to bolster Port's war on ash borer

Written by KRISTYN HALBIG ZIEHM
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City to use \$25,000 in state DNR funding to track treatments, protect trees, replace those killed by beetle

Port Washington's battle against the emerald ash borer got a boost with a \$25,000 grant from the Department of Natural Resources, Public Works Director Rob Vanden Noven said Tuesday.

The grant will help the city purchase a specialized software program to help it manage its trees and treatments against the borer, Vanden Noven told the Board of Public Works.

The grant will also help purchase chemicals needed to treat ash trees against the borer and replace trees that are killed by the beetle, he said.

The grant will provide matching funds, he said, so the city will have to spend an equal amount of money.

That shouldn't be difficult. The city has 1,100 ash trees along its streets — 14% of the trees that line its roads — and many more in its parks that are at risk of being killed by the borer, which was first detected in the community in June.

Since then, the city has committed itself to waging a battle against the emerald ash borer, an invasive green beetle that has killed tens of millions of trees from the East Coast to the Midwest since it was first found in the U.S. in 2002.

While the borer was first found in Port Washington last year, it has likely been in the community for years, officials said, noting it takes several years for trees to show the effect of the pest.

Vanden Noven said he does not know how many trees in the city are infested with the borer.

The borer was initially found in a dead ash tree on a wooded hillside in the 400 block of North Powers Street, and officials said several other trees in the area were likely killed by the borer.

It has also been detected in trees downtown and on Webster Street, where Vanden Noven said virtually every ash tree is infested.

Officials agreed last year that they will chemically treat select ash trees against the borer in an attempt to stem the damage done by the bug.

The city may have another weapon to use against the insect, Vanden Noven told the board.

The Department of Natural Resources has asked if the city would be willing to allow the release of parasitic wasps that feed on the borer's eggs and larvae, Vanden Noven said.

The wasps, which are the natural enemy of the borer, have been released at Riveredge

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Nature Center in the Town of Saukville, which is near the area where the first emerald ash borer in the state was detected in 2008.

"They will spread here in a couple years, but releasing them here will make that happen sooner," Vanden Noven said.

State officials have said it will take as long as five years to determine whether the wasps are having an impact on the borer, he noted.

"Do they sting?" board member Mike Ehrlich asked.

The wasps are less than a quarter-inch in size and pose no danger to humans or other animals, Vanden Noven said.

The DNR is not sure how many wasps it will have this year, he added, so there is no guarantee they will be released in Port Washington.