Shaftsbury Emerald Ash Borer Management Plan

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Problem: Emerald ash borer (EAB), a non-native beetle from southeast Asia, was introduced to North American in the 1990s. It feeds on and kills all three species of ash trees native to Vermont. First detected in Vermont in 2018, the presence of EAB was confirmed in Shaftsbury in 2020. Black ash (*Fraxinus nigra*) and green ash (*Fraxinus pennsylvanica*) are extremely susceptible to mortality from emerald ash borer infestation. White ash (*Fraxinus americana),* the most abundant ash species in Shaftsbury's upland and roadside forests, may survive EAB infestation for years or decades longer than other ash species. However, there is no known way to predict which ash trees will succumb to EAB infestation. Due to the extremely brittle and unpredictable nature of EAB-infested dead and dying ash trees, and the quick rate of decline (tree death is usually within 3-5 years of infestation), many land managers are pre-emptively cutting ash trees that pose future risk and expense to the town when they fall on roads.

Goals: The goals of this EAB management plan are to:

1. prevent damage and injury that may occur from falling pieces of infested ash trees or whole ash trees that are in the town right-of-way.
2. reduce unexpected demands on the local road crew by preemptively removing right-of-way ash;
3. spread out the cost of right-of-way ash tree removal, an expense borne by the municipality;
4. be ready to apply for any grant funding to support EAB management if it becomes available (https://vtcommunityforestry.org/municipal-assistance/financial-assistance);
5. follow the Slow the Spread recommendations that keep infested or potentially infested ash trees within the town;
6. plan for wood utilization in the community if landowners do not want to keep the wood; and
7. raise awareness about the prevalence and location of ash trees throughout town and the risks from emerald ash borer infestation.

Strategies: The Town of Shaftsbury will address ash tree management using the following strategies:

1) The Select Board will form an ad hoc emerald ash borer committee that's made up of no less than five members appointed for 2-year terms including a representative from the Select Board, a representative from the Department of Public Works, the Shaftsbury Tree Warden, and at least 2 members of the public with knowledge of and interest in trees, expertise in the management and removal of trees, and/or experience in community outreach/community organization.

2) The Select Board will authorize and direct the Emerald Ash Borer Committee to:

- assess the presence and condition of ash trees within the town right-of-way on all town roads;
- assess the condition of other danger trees in direct proximity to the ash within the ROW;
- propose a multi-year plan to remove identified trees, and once the plan is approved, oversee the implementation of the plan.
- develop a Public Information Plan for Shaftsbury property owners and residents.

3) Road segments will be identified for ash removal following a winter 2025-2026 pilot project on Maple Hill Road in the area between the Jack Cross Road intersection and the Cider Mill Road intersection. This pilot project will be conducted by the DPW, and the exercise will help identify best practices. Going forward, road segments prioritized for ash removals will be ranked based on the number and density of ash trees that pose elevated risk to road safety; local traffic patterns; the condition and size of existing ash trees; and access needs within town.

3) The Select Board will aim to budget at least $XXXX per year to finance roadside ash tree removals.
4) The EAB Committee, in partnership with the DPW, will establish a marshalling yard to accept any ash logs not kept by the landowner on whose land the right-of-way passes; also a location to accept either ash branches for chipping on site, or chipped ash branches brought to this location.
5) The EAB committee will establish a communication plan with landowners along roads prioritized for removals to notify them of right-of-way ash tree removal and ask if the landowner will be keeping the downed logs.
6) The EAB committee will help establish a communication plan with the town to notify all residents of the ash removal projects and any associated road closures, explain the risks associated with infested ash trees, and accept feedback.
7) Once the pilot project has been completed, the town will:
    - complete ash cutting and removal utilizing time, expertise, and equipment provided by the Shaftsbury DPW or
    - seek requests for bids from loggers and arborists to cut roadside ash as marked by the tree warden or his or her assigned deputy, volunteer, or contractor, or a combination of the two approaches listed above as determined by tree size, DPW time and equipment availability, availability of grant assistance, and scope of work each year.
8) Any contractors engaged by the Town will be required to coordinate with the Town Road Foreman to determine the project scope, location, and start date.

9) Anyone cutting ash in the right-of-way will be required to ensure that logs are not left in the ditch or where they will interfere with town road equipment.
10) The EAB Committee and Select Board will update this plan every year to stay abreast of EAB spread, achieved objectives, and planning necessary for future funding applications should they become available.

Notes on Ash Tree Removals

Trees declining due to EAB weaken quickly. This means that as time goes on, the likelihood of the trees falling apart can be expected to steadily climb. While the risk of these trees goes up over time even if left alone, the weakened wood poses higher risks to the workers performing the removals. The more technical the removal, (involving climbing, rigging, or other advanced methods) the more important it is that the workers can rely on the strength of the wood to withstand the forces exerted by the climbing, cutting, and rigging processes. The most difficult and costly trees to remove may be removed first, since risk involved in the process of removal can be expected to be at its lowest point now and will increase going forward.

This increase in risk and cost makes it prudent to remove the ash trees soon.

Notes on Lowering the Cost of Removals

There are over a thousand ash trees in Shaftsbury's current roadside ash inventory, which covers roughly 70 % of the Class 2 and Class 3 roads in our town. Removal of all municipally-managed ash trees is likely infeasible due to time and budget constraints. There are, however, several *options for lowering cost*.

1. Leave logs lying on site. The trees pose no risk once they are lying on the ground. The DPW and any contractors engaged by the Town may be instructed to leave wood in log lengths.
2. Provide a nearby dump site for chips. This will save valuable time.
3. Leave small (<4" DBH) ash trees to die in place. If a small tree dies and falls on the road or a vehicle, it is very unlikely to cause any real damage. The price of removal of these trees will not increase much going forward, because they are not large enough to require special techniques.
4. Concentrate each batch of removals in a small area. This is crucial to make traffic control and project management easier.

Notes on the Request for Proposals

- Provide a map as part of an RFP for bids on the removals.
- Provide a list and map of the landowners who want to keep the wood.
- Mark trees with tape or paint before the RFP goes out.

- Provide a table that summarizes the numbers and sizes of trees that are being removed for contractors to use for pricing.
- Follow all Shaftsbury procurement policies.

Notes on Action Steps

Discuss, amend, and vote to accept this plan when complete.

Empower or solidify who will be responsible for carrying out the parts of the plan.

Apply for funding through any available grants.