

The city should pursue an expert's opinion that treatment can be successful and cost effective in saving the trees of Lake Park and elsewhere

The City of Port Washington has invested heavily in its future, specifically in its future as a place where for generations to come its streets, walkways, neighborhoods, parks and downtown will be graced by the beauty, shade, bird life and sound-mellowing and air-purifying effects of hundreds upon hundreds of deciduous trees.

It is to the city's enduring credit that even in a time of economic challenges and revenue constraints it has carried on an aggressive tree-planting program, budgeting funds annually to buy, plant and maintain trees. Trees in public places are essential to the quality of life in a community, and worth every penny they cost taxpayers.

If these young trees, planted as bare-root saplings, are assets to community life—and they surely are—think how much more valuable are the mature trees that have grown for decades and, as their towering green canopies attest, have reached their potential as gifts of nature.

We hope city officials are thinking of that and preparing to refuse to let Port Washington's forest of ash trees succumb to the emerald ash borer.

There are hundreds of these trees on public land throughout the city, including a magnificent stand in Upper Lake Park. Their loss to the insect that is killing ash trees across the Midwest would be nothing less than a disaster.

An arborist who is an expert on the predations of the ash borer made an illuminating presentation to the Park and Recreation Board earlier this month that was both sobering and hopeful.

Sobering indeed was the prediction by Wayne White of Union Lake, Mich., that if nothing is done all of the city's ash trees will likely be dead in a few years. Ash borer infestation of trees in and around downtown has been confirmed. The insects will attack other ash trees.

The hopeful part was White's assurance that the bug can be defeated. He claimed a 99% success rate in treating trees with a combination of insecticide injections and drenching soil with nutrients.

White estimated that treating the 200 ash trees in Upper Lake Park would cost \$15,000 a year for a number of years. If that number is daunting, it was softened by the arborist's explanation that not every tree in the park would have to be treated. The best specimens among them could be selected for treatment, while marginal trees could be sacrificed.

The most intriguing statement in the presentation was White's assertion that it would cost more to remove the park's ash trees after they are killed by the borer than to treat them.

Do not forsake Port's noble ash trees

Written by Ozaukee Press

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If that is true—and, of course, the city needs to verify it independently—it should make the decision easy: Find the money to treat at least the healthiest, strongest trees. Better to spend it on saving trees than cutting them down and disposing of tainted wood.

The ash borer is a clear, present and quite awful threat—Lake Park without trees is too painful to contemplate—and the city needs to deal with it as such and move quickly to adopt an effective response. Allowing nature to take its course, meaning letting the trees die, seems to be an option the city government is considering. It shouldn't be. Attempting to save as many sound trees as possible should be the only option.

A treatment program should be as comprehensive as it can be, taking into account not only ash trees on parkland, but also some in parkways along streets. Ash trees on private property, which after all are part of the community forest, should be considered as well. The possibility that an arborist service provider who gets the city contract might be able to offer more attractive rates to both the city and private payers for a large volume of work should be explored.

Welcome as they are along city streets, the ranks of newly planted trees are still only slender, sparsely-leaved hopes for a green future. The great ashes of Port Washington, mature trees of tall, sturdy trunks and arching crowns, are the trees of the present, splendid living things and important contributors to the city's character that must not be forsaken.