



Update from the Tree Warden and the West Newbury Tree Committee Regarding Trees Along Public Roadways in Town (Feb. 2024)

West Newbury is fortunate to have so many outstanding trees lining our roadways and, without doubt, the health of these trees is very important to all of us. This is an update on what is currently being done and what lies ahead with respect to the Emerald Ash Borer infestation that has attacked many of the ash trees along our public roadway.

- By way of background, the health of trees along public roadways can be adversely impacted by many factors, either alone or in combination. These factors include harsh summer drought, insect infestation, fungal disease, road salt, rising water level in low lying areas, lack of room for adequate root growth, and lack of critical nutrients, among others.
- Of particular concern currently, ash trees are being subjected to attack from the Emerald Ash Borer (EAB). The first survey of public roadway trees took place in 2022, and 466 ash trees were identified and tagged. Of these 466 trees, 177 were deemed to be in good or fair health and 289 were deemed unhealthy or dead. The recommendation was to carry out a program to inject the 177 public roadway trees in good or fair health with a pesticide that would combat the EAB.
- The trunk injection program for these 177 ash trees was carried out in late spring of 2023. A follow-up survey was then conducted in late fall to evaluate the results of the injection program. The survey determined that 88 trees remained healthy but that 89 trees had become unhealthy enough not to merit any further treatment.
- The current situation is that a total of 373 ash trees along public roadways in West Newbury are unhealthy or dead and are candidates for removal. Unhealthy and dead trees along public roadways present various degrees of hazard and risk to the people and properties of West Newbury, particularly along the more heavily traveled roads. The Department of Public Works (DPW) has the responsibility to address these hazards and, within available resources, to alleviate unacceptable risks.
- For many years, the DPW has had an ongoing program for removal of High Hazard trees, and the DPW will continue to fund the removal of such trees within their regular operating budgets as approved. As of winter 2023-24, all trees previously identified as High Hazard

have been removed. However, this ongoing program is not designed or sufficient for handling the large number of public roadway ash trees that should be removed.

- As a result, the DPW plans to seek additional funding (probably in the amount of \$50,000) at spring town meeting to address the need to alleviate the hazards that now exists with respect to the 373 ash trees that have been identified as candidates for removal. While the additional funding will not address all 373 ash trees, it will allow the DPW to remove some of the ash trees along highly traveled public roads that are likely to present a higher degree of hazard.
- The cost to remove a dead or dying tree varies widely depending on individual site factors, such as the type and size of the tree, the proximity of utility wires, the proximity of structures, the ease of access for large equipment, and the need for public safety protection during removal activities. The planned, additional funding to begin removal of dead and unhealthy ash trees will serve as a "pilot" program that is expected to give the town an indication of how much future funding will be necessary for removal of all 373 ash trees in light of the site-specific factors that may be involved.
- For the longer term, the DPW may determine that it is appropriate to revisit the general plan for removal of dead and dying trees to determine the most cost-effective and tax-sensible approach for addressing other trees along public roadways that need to be removed.
- Reminders about other factors related to tree removal along public roadways:
 - The public utility companies, such as National Grid, are legally charged with the responsibility of clearing electric utility lines, and public utility companies have the right to engage in tree trimming and tree removal themselves.
 - Public roadway trees along Main Street (Rt. 113) are located on state property and are generally not within the jurisdiction of the Town.

If you have any questions about our public trees in town, feel free to contact the Tree Warden, Richard (Butch) Hills at Highway@wnewbury.org or by phone at 978-363-1100 extension 120.

The West Newbury Tree Committee is also available to answer questions, especially regarding privately owned trees, they can be reached by email at: treecommittee@wnewbury.org