

Meeting Minutes for the Town of East Montpelier

Resilient Roads Committee

Thursday, July 23, 2020

The meeting was hosted by Town of East Montpelier at the Municipal Office Building and via Zoom due to the COVID-19 pandemic on July 23, 2020.

Attending: Jeff Cueto, Chair, Paul Cate, Tree Warden, and Committee members Steve Justis, Guthrie Perry and Jack Pauly. Town Manager Bruce Johnson participated in the call, as did Joanne Garton, Technical Assistance Coordinator for the VT Urban & Community Forestry Program with the Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation.

Committee Chair Jeff Cueto called the meeting to order at 3:06 p.m. and asked Steve Justis to take minutes.

Jeff provided an update on the U-32 Emerald Ash Borer Management Grants: Ash Tree Removals and Tree Replacements project. Tree removals along Gallison Hill and Wheeler roads is complete. Most work on Schoolhouse Road was postponed due to the presence of nesting hawks and will be resumed in the fall.

Jeff reminded attendees to keep track of their time related to the grant. Participants time will be valued at \$25 per hour and will be used as a match towards the \$15,000 grant we received in the spring.

Paul Cate reported on his work with the three interns in the North Branch Nature Center's Master Naturalist Class. Work includes a history of Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) in East Montpelier, talking with landowners and providing information on EAB, tagging trees to keep at U-32, cutting some canopy trees to release desirable understory trees and using a weed wrench to remove invasive plants, such as buckthorn.

Jeff continued his update. EAB traps had been placed on property of Seth Gardner (Snow Hill Road) and Steve Justis (Center Road). A couple of "possible" EABs were sent to UVM for identification. Last spring, Jeff updated the town's ash tree inventory to reflect tree removal undertaken by Washington Electric and Green Mountain Power; GMP has completed all of its planned removal of ash trees within the road rights of way.

There was a general discussion of using chips for mulch for the tree planting on the U-32 campus. No chips were gathered for the U-32 project to date, but Guthrie Perry said that the town road crew could generate chips for mulch generally with a couple of days notice.

Due to COVID-19 pandemic, the Town will be asking the grantor for an extension on the prophylactic treatment of historic or prominent trees until next spring. Part of Montpelier's treatment team had been furloughed due the pandemic but are now back at work.

Paul suggested that the Committee continue to coordinate with Washington Electric on treatment trees, signage and EAB related issues.

Between 6 and 8 new trees are being planned for the U-32 campus. Paul and Guthrie will coordinate obtaining chips to use as mulch for the U-32 trees. Paul, Paul's class, and Steve may dig and ball & burlaps a few trees from Steve's property, primarily Swamp White Oaks (*Q. bicolor*) if additional trees are wanted for the U-32 or other plantings in the fall.

Jeff mentioned that on behalf of the Committee he had submitted a request for \$25,000 per annum to East Montpelier's Capital Improvement Committee in June for removal of dead or infested ash trees for each of the next ten years. No decisions have been made on the funding to date. The proposal is essentially a place keeper until the Selectboard decides whether the Town will continue its proactive approach; the ash tree management plan will not be finalized until next year at the earliest.

The group discussed the need for continued outreach to the community on the status of EAB in town. To date, the COVID-19 pandemic has thwarted any major efforts for outreach, but Joanne Garton suggested a possible press conference and press releases. The Committee will continue to use The East Montpelier Sign Post and Front Porch Forum for disseminating information on EAB to townspeople. The Times Argus and The World are other local media that might be used.

A discussion ensued on the town road crew's goals and maintenance practices for roadside vegetation, and specifically its use of its new "over-the-rail" mower. Overall, the group felt that the mower should be used more judiciously. Paul offered to provide some guidance on protecting desirable trees along town rights of way, and there was some discussion the value of roadside vegetation for erosion and sediment control and the sand and gravel ending up in ditches when the vegetation along the road shoulder was removed too drastically. The Committee and road foreman will continue to evaluate best practices and enhanced protection of desirable roadside vegetation.

Paul moved that the meeting be adjourned. Jack Pauly seconded the motion and the meeting adjourned at 4:18 p.m.