

Tree-eating insect may pose real threat in Harding

By MIKE CONDON Staff Writer | Posted: Thursday, September 17, 2015 12:19 pm

HARDING TWP. — Mayor Nicolas Platt has done his research on the Emerald ash borer, and he does not like what he has learned.

The insect has become infamous for destroying ash trees, and Platt said the infestation is heading this way. In fact, it has already been identified in Somerset County.

“I attended a lecture with (Harding resident) Jane Kendall on these emerald ash borers. They arrived in the U.S. in packing crates from China and were first identified in Ohio,” Platt said at the Township Committee meeting Monday night.

He said they are about the size of a firefly, and that they bore into ash trees, creating a hole about the size of the hole that would result from sticking a pencil through a piece of cardboard. Once inside, they clog the tree’s arteries by laying larvae. The result, Platt said, is millions of ash trees die within two years.

The good news, however, is that trees can be inoculated, at a cost of about \$100 a year, per tree.

“Harding Township is in the watch zone. This insect has been found in Bridgewater, and we are in the watch zone,” he said.

Platt said he has asked Kendall to work with the Shade Tree Commission to formulate a plan to deal with the impending issue, which he said could have dire consequences in such a rural township.

“This Township Committee will have to make some tough decisions. A lot of our street trees are ash, and we will have to tell residents who have ash trees, too. You can inoculate trees. They have insecticides that are put in through the root system, but it has to be done soon, and it has to be done when it’s sunny outside,” Platt said. “This has the potential to radically change our landscape.”

States Suffer

Kendall said that thus far, 25 states have been affected. The 25 states, she said, have been placed under a



The culprit

The Emerald Ash Borer migrated to the U.S. from China, and is now destroying ash trees in 25 states. In Harding Township, officials are sounding the alarm that this could be a real threat to the township’s rural environment.

federal quarantine, meaning that firewood cannot be moved from state to state.

“This started in 2002 in Michigan, and firewood is one of the major transmitters,” she said.

There is even a website called “donotmovefirewood.org” which details the problem, and the dangers.

“The bottom line is that no one should be taking firewood except if it’s from their next door neighbor,” she said.

She said the state has already come up with a template that towns can use to battle the problem and to prepare for it.

“This could potentially cause millions of dollars worth of damage. These trees could be dying and falling all over the place. We have to deal with this issue. The Great Swamp refuge also has to deal with this. They are monitoring their trees as well,” she said. “Michigan lost almost all of their ash trees. If you have ash trees on your property, treat it, or they will die.”

Kendall said Rutgers University is already testing logs.

“If you see little holes, you may already have them. We haven’t had any official diagnosis, but we may already have it here in Harding,” she said. “It was found in Bridgewater last year, and I have seen ash trees that do not look very healthy. Nic (Platt) is looking at the ash trees on his property, but it can be hard to spot. It’s under the bark. You can’t see it, but it cuts off the nutrients and the water.”

The number one tip is not to move firewood from town to town, she said. Local shade tree commissions, she said, will be the leaders in the movement to stop the spread.

“We will have to inventory our trees. Many universities in the northwest have grappled with this since 2002, so we can stand on the shoulders of giants; those who are already tackling with this,” she said.

Platt and Kendall compared the epidemic to Dutch elm disease, which plagued trees in the last century.

“That destroyed the entire suburban midwest. But for this, there is a treatment,” Kendall said.

Platt said the township needs to take the lead in getting residents aware.

“The trees can be inoculated, but it has to be done very soon. This is as bad if not worse than I initially thought it was,” Platt said. “We have to educate residents that this is a serious threat. We will lose every ash tree, except those that have been treated.”

Platt said that the local “Friends of Trees” group already has planed 200 new trees a year for the last five years. And that’s just to replace trees lost during Hurricane Sandy and the other fall storm that year.

Resident Jim Heimeman said a recent New York Times article detailed the problem, and said insect

originated in the Manchurian ash tree.

Platt said that right now, there are a lot of unanswered questions.

“I have many ash trees on my property. I have to decide how many to inoculate. And the inoculation lasts for two years. But what then? Do you have to treat until the Emerald ash borer goes away? Does the tree become immune? It’s all open ended right now. How much of this compound are the trees going to have to suck up and for how long?” he said.

Platt said he will reach out to the Morris County Freeholders to address the issue. He also plans to discuss it with state legislators.

“We may be able to get federal forestry funds to treat this,” she said.

Kendall said it’s a new problem, newly identified in the area.

“No local towns have plans in place for this yet,” she said.

According to Wikipedia, the online encyclopedia, the natural range of the emerald ash borer is eastern Russia, northern China, Japan, and Korea.

It is invasive in North America where it has a core population in Michigan and surrounding states and provinces. Populations are more scattered outside the core area, and the edges of its known distribution range north to the upper peninsula of Michigan, south to northern Louisiana, west to Colorado, and east to Massachusetts.

Gates Ordinance

In another matter, the committee introduced an ordinance which will set parameters for installing gates at the foot of residential driveways.

According to Committeeman Chris Yates, the ordinance comes at the request of the fire department, which has often had trouble accessing some properties.

“There are too many gates impeding access in emergencies. This ordinance will amend our existing code to set parameters how wide the gate opening has to be,” he said.

Specifically, gates must be 40 feet away from the opposite side of the street from the home. In addition, pillars holding the gate must be 20 feet apart so fire equipment can gain access.