

For Immediate Release

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## Invasive species to force extensive tree removal at Westover Park

HARRISONBURG, Va. – Staff with Harrisonburg’s Parks and Recreation and Public Works departments have begun removing 200 infected ash trees from Westover Park that have been damaged by emerald ash borers, an invasive species to our area.

The effort, which began Monday, seeks to reutilize the trees through an environmental project taking place at Purcell Park. A bioreactor, which uses wood chips to help remove nitrate out of water, will be installed at Purcell to help filter run-off before it enters the park’s pond. In addition to the 200 trees being removed in the coming days, another 470 trees are expected to be removed from Westover Park in the near future, all of which will support City projects.

The effort will allow City staff to reuse the trees, which would otherwise die in the coming years due to emerald ash borer infestations already taking place. In turn, the bioreactor will cut down on the growth of algae in the Purcell Park pond, and removed trees will gradually be replaced by a diverse mix of trees.

Some 500 native seedlings have already been purchased and will be planted in the fall, and another 100 to 150 larger trees will be purchased later this year for planting in October and November. Parks and Recreation plans to plant one tree for every one removed.

“While we are saddened by the loss of the trees and what that will mean for the beauty and environment of Westover Park, it is reassuring to know that this loss will support the health of Purcell Park and the area’s water quality,” Parks and Recreation Director Luanne Santangelo said. “Staff has worked tirelessly to mitigate



*(Above) An ash tree is marked in Westover Park. The City has started removing 200 infected trees.*



*(Above) Lines under the bark of a Westover Park ash tree show damage from young emerald ash borers.*

the impact of the emerald ash borers since they arrived in our area in 2016, and we know this project will ultimately have a positive impact on our community.”

The emerald ash borer not only eats the leaves of ash trees, but the young beetles feed on the inner bark of the trees, damaging the tree. They are responsible for the death of hundreds of millions of trees in North America, according to the Arbor Day Foundation.

As a result, Harrisonburg Parks and Recreation began the Urban Wood Utilization program to find ways to reuse ash trees staff knew could not be saved. The wood has already been used on some City projects, and more information is available online at [www.harrisonburgva.gov/urban-forestry-program](http://www.harrisonburgva.gov/urban-forestry-program).

The bioreactor is being done through a partnership with Ridge to Reefs. It is expected to begin operation in early August. Westover Park will remain open during work, and visitors should not cross orange construction fencing or approach or climb on equipment.

***The City of Harrisonburg*** is centrally located in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. It is home to approximately 54,000 people. More information about the City of Harrisonburg is available online at [www.HarrisonburgVA.gov](http://www.HarrisonburgVA.gov).



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