

**COUNTY OF MILWAUKEE**  
Inter-Office Communication

Date: November 7, 2022  
To: Marcelia Nicholson, Chairwoman, Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors  
From: Guy Smith, Executive Director Milwaukee County Parks  
Subject: Community Tree Program  
File Type: Informational Report

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**REQUEST**

File No. 20-418, approved by the Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors at the June 25, 2020 meeting, requests that the Department of Parks, Recreation, and Culture (DPRC) submit an informational report each year summarizing the program.

**POLICY**

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| Wisconsin State Statutes:                    |  |
| Milwaukee County Code of General Ordinances: | Ch. 108 – Achieving Racial Equity and Health |
| Specific Adopted Budget:                     |  |
| Specific Adopted Budget Amendment:           |  |
| Specific Adopted Capital Project:            |  |

**BACKGROUND**

|   |                              |
|---|------------------------------|
| Related File No's:                                    | 20-418                       |
| Associated File No's<br>(Including Transfer Packets): |                              |
| Previous Action Date(s):                              | June 12, 2020, June 25, 2020 |

For the past ten years, Milwaukee County Parks Forestry Division has devoted significant resources to addressing the impact of the Emerald Ash Borer (EAB). The EAB, or *Agrilus planipennis*, is an invasive, wood boring beetle that kills ash trees by eating the tissue under the bark. A tree that has been attacked by EAB often dies within four years. EAB was first observed in 2002, and aggressively spread, due often to inadvertent human actions. Over the past decade, thousands of ash trees in Milwaukee County Parks, and millions across the Midwest, have been infested/killed by Emerald Ash Borer.

Milwaukee County Parks (“Parks”) is responsible for 15,000 acres of land that have an estimated 1.5 million trees. Before the EAB’s infestation, the Forestry Division was focused on tree planting and trimming. However, with the arrival of EAB in Milwaukee County in 2011, the work focus changed. Within a few years, there was a staggering rise

in infested and dying ash trees. Infested ash trees provide significant safety concerns to the residents of Milwaukee County. Affected ash trees can lose large limbs, or worse, be subject to a total height, catastrophic failure.

Parks Forestry Division are committed to tree removal in the parks high-use public areas as a safety priority. These areas include parks and facilities that receive a constant to frequent occupancy level, such as playgrounds, paved trails, buildings, parking lots, and picnic areas. Often it is most effective to remove all infested trees in a park at once, rather than coming back and only removing a few at a time. As such, a park may have 50 or more highly visible trees removed in a very short timeframe. Of the past ten years, Forestry has removed about 25,000 trees throughout the parks in Milwaukee County. At current staffing and funding levels, the ash removal efforts should be completed by 2030.

As removal efforts continue, in recent years, Parks has begun replanting trees throughout our system. For example, in 2021 Forestry removed 2,542 trees and planted 1,425. This reforestation work is tempered by several challenges. First, after tree removal, the ground is often unsuitable for immediate replanting. In some park locations, additional tree removals are still required, so Forestry are unable to plant new trees as they could be damaged by the removal of nearby trees. Secondly, to align with best practices, forestry professionals recommend staggering tree plantings such that a park would achieve a range of tree species and ages. This may mean only some trees are replanted with additional plantings in the future. Thirdly, some parks were also “over-planted”, meaning that tree density in some locations was more than current best practices recommend. Lastly, budget, staffing, and the seasons do not allow us to replant trees at the same rate of removal.

To assist Parks in its replanting efforts, the County Board authorized the establishment of the Community Tree Program (File 20-418). This program allows the County Board to annually approve tree donations, instead of approving on an individual basis.

In 2020 Parks received \$7,000 in donations through the program that funded the planting of 25 trees in three different parks as specified by the donors:

- Cooper Park
- Sheridan Park
- Tippecanoe Park

In 2021 Parks received \$6,500 in donations that funded the planting of 25 trees at a variety of park locations, including Humboldt Park. Parks is appreciative of this support and looks to the continued use of the Community Tree Program to support reforestation efforts.

To supplement the donations to the Community Tree Program, in 2022 Parks planted 138 trees in September and October 2022 at parks that have had significant number of removals. Many of these parks are in the urban core of the County, and include:

- Dretzka Golf Course (15 trees)
- Harriet Tubman Park (12 trees)

- Indigenous Peoples Park (12 trees)
- Kern Park (30 trees)
- Lincoln Park (44 trees)
- Meaux Park (25 trees)

An additional 315 trees were purchased to replenish the MCP nursery. These trees will be delivered over a three-year period, and the first tranche of trees were received in October 2022.

**TERMS**

None

**VIRTUAL MEETING INVITES**

None

**PREPARED BY:**

Peter Bratt, Director of Operations & Skilled Trades

**APPROVED BY:**

Guy Smith, Executive Director Milwaukee County Parks *Guy Smith*

**ATTACHMENTS:**

CC:

David Crowley, County Executive  
 Mary Jo Meyers, Chief of Staff, County Executive's Office  
 Sheldon Wasserman, Supervisor District 3, PEEC Chair  
 Steven Shea, Supervisor District 8, PEEC Vice Chair  
 Felicia Martin, Supervisor District 7, PEEC Member  
 Juan Miguel Martinez, Supervisor District 12, PEEC Member  
 Steve Taylor, Supervisor District 17, PEEC Member  
 Kelly Bablitch, Chief of Staff, Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors  
 Janelle M. Jensen, Legislative Services Division Mgr, Office of the County Clerk  
 Aaron Hertzberg, Director, Department of Administrative Services  
 Joseph Lamers, Fiscal & Budget Director, DAS  
 Vince Masterson, Fiscal & Strategic Asset Coordinator, DAS  
 Pamela Bryant, Capital Finance Manager, Comptroller's Office  
 Justin Rodriguez, Capital Finance Analyst, Comptroller's Office  
 Kelsey Evans, Committee Coordinator, Office of the County Clerk  
 Ciara Miller, Research & Policy Analyst, Office of the Comptroller  
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