

Stothert says Omaha is ready to fight the ash borer

By Christopher Burbach / World-Herald staff writer | Posted: Saturday, August 1, 2015 12:30 am

Omaha Mayor Jean Stothert said Friday the city doesn't need to hire more tree trimmers and buy more tree removal equipment next year in anticipation of an emerald ash borer infestation.

Several City Council members had said after a briefing from the city forester Tuesday that they are considering amending the city's 2016 budget to get ahead of the pest's arrival.

Stothert said Friday that she would have to see an amendment proposal before deciding whether to oppose it. But she and Brook Bench, Omaha's city parks and recreation director, said the city is in good shape in its preparations for the emerald ash borer.

"We are working on a plan," Stothert said. "It was never recommended by the Parks Department or by the Nebraska Forest Service that we need to start removing healthy trees to get ahead of it. That's not recommended at this point in time to get ahead of it."

Stothert also said it's too early to start treating trees. The closest to Omaha that the ash borer has been spotted is about 100 miles away in Iowa.

The Nebraska Forest Service recommends beginning to treat ash trees when the ash borer has been confirmed within 15 miles, she said.

Stothert said the city may not need more equipment, may be able to save more trees through treatment, and if it does have to cut down many trees because of the ash borers, the city may outsource that work to contractors.

Stothert said the city can't budget for "what-if" scenarios. But she said the city is preparing adequately for the ash borer.

Stothert said the city's efforts include:

» Taking an inventory of ash trees on city property, which showed 6,482 on city right-of-way, 4,340 in



ash borer

Emerald ash borers have killed tens of millions of trees since 2002. The beetle is expected to hit Omaha.

city parks and 686 on city golf courses. That doesn't include trees on private property.

- » Removing dead or damaged ash trees as city crews come across them in parks and near playgrounds.
- » Analyzing options and costs for treating trees with insecticide to save them from the destructive beetle.

Bench said new and more effective treatments are being developed. Indications are that some treatments may protect trees for several years, instead of just two as initially believed.

Stothert said there are 40 ash trees on public property in the neighborhoods she proposes to annex this year. She said her administration included an estimated cost of treating those trees, \$40,000, in its annexation calculations.

The emerald ash borer has killed tens of millions of trees in 25 states since it first appeared in Detroit in 2002.

It has been confirmed in Iowa, Missouri, Kansas and Colorado and is expected to eventually arrive in Nebraska.

Omaha City Forester John Wynn told the council he hoped to be able to save about 3,000 of Omaha's ash trees on city property.

The Omaha City Council asked the Finance Department this week for an analysis of what it would cost to add a crew of three tree trimmers and begin lease-purchasing the equipment the city forester told them would be needed for in-house tree removal.

The council had not received that analysis by Friday.

Bench said Friday that the last thing he wants to do is cut down healthy ash trees.

City Councilman Pete Festersen, who plans to pursue a budget amendment, said he is not proposing to cut down healthy ash trees, but to remove diseased and dying ones that would not survive an infestation.

Festersen said the city's two tree-trimming crews "are doing a good job, but I don't think we're caught up on ones that need to be trimmed or removed, whether or not they're ash trees."

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