



Communications Plan

Business Client: Community & Fire Services - Operations
Project: Emerald Ash Borer

1. Current Situation

- I. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) confirmed the presence of the Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) in Markham in July 2011
- II. Briefing note delivered to Markham Council July 2011
- III. Presentation delivered to General Committee October 17, 2011
- IV. Inventory and health assessment of 16,738 ash trees on municipal boulevards, open spaces in our park, and follow-up health assessment of inventoried trees completed summer 2012
- V. EAB Management Plan update presented to General Committee on Nov. 19, 2012
- VI. Ash tree deterioration and losses now progressing very rapidly due to EAB and the December 2013 Ice Storm; 3,100 trees removed to-date (estimated 2,000 of these are ash trees) and another 6,000 to be removed by the end of 2014
- VII. Plan is to remove 4,000 stumps are being removed in 2014 to allow for an aggressive replanting program in 2015
- VIII. 300 trees replanted in spring 2014
- IX. An additional 320 trees to be planted in fall 2014
- X. Inventory and health assessment of about 14,000 ash trees on municipal boulevards completed in early July 2014
- XI. Updated total city ash trees on boulevards and in manicured parks about 17,200
- XII. Recent EAB treatment research indicates better control occurs when ash trees are injected annually rather than the previous biannual injections recommended by BioForest
- XIII. Only 354 City ash trees remain of treatable size and condition, and have been treated with TreeAzin this year
- XIV. A city-wide inventory of all species of trees on city-owned land is underway to determine the current composition of Markham's urban forest and provide data to support a strong and diverse replanting program



2. Business Objectives

- I. Refine and continue implementation of EAB management plan that focuses on preserving as many of the remaining ash trees of a treatable size and condition as possible, as well as the removal, stumping and replanting of dead and hazardous ash trees
- II. Undertake a strategic replanting program that ensures the City is well positioned to mitigate future pest infestations by diversification of the urban forest
- III. The following impacts continue to be top-of-mind:
 - a. Public Safety
 - b. Financial
 - c. Environmental
 - d. Aesthetic

3. Strategic Considerations

- a. **Issues/risks:**
 - i. Unknown number of ash trees in Markham woodlots and natural areas
 - ii. Ash trees break down quickly once they die, potentially dropping large limbs which may damage property or cause injury
 - iii. Trees are costly to treat or remove/replace, especially when trees to be removed have been dead for some time; additional equipment is often required
 - iv. Removal and disposal within quarantine areas (CFIA regulations)
 - v. Credibility of arborists consulted by residents regarding ash trees with potential EAB infestation
 - vi. Affect on residents of ash trees in Markham dying
 - vii. Replanting Program – size and type of tree used to replace ash trees that are cut down
 - viii. Current tree preservation bylaw allows expedited removal of EAB infested ash trees



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- ix. Some residents have expressed interest in caring for City ash trees not designated for treatment based on best practice of many other municipalities and process for them to pay for injections at own cost has been developed
- x. Enforcement of removal of hazardous trees on private properties will impact By-law staff

b. Threats

- i. Availability of industry resources to implement EAB Management Plan in the required timeframe; contractors for inventory, removals, locates, stumping, replanting and management consultants
- ii. Cost – municipal budget availability
- iii. Lack of facilities to handle magnitude of wood disposal and utilization
- iv. Non-City owned land – Ontario Realty Corp. (ORC) and other government agencies
- v. Illegal dumping of wood/debris
- vi. Homeowner refusal to remove dead or hazardous tree(s)

c. Opportunities

- i. Leverage communications strategy/tactics development and delivery in collaboration with York Region EAB Communications Subcommittee of EAB Working Group
- ii. Leverage partnerships with/promotion of community-based advocacy groups and programs related to combating the effects of EAB and/or supporting maintenance and enhancement of Markham's urban forest

4. Key Stakeholders

- a. Markham residents
- b. Markham Council
- c. Local media – mainstream & ethnic
- d. York Region
- e. TRCA
- f. ORC



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- g. Crown landowners
- h. *Trees for Life*, the Urban Tree Canopy Coalition
- i. Local arborists
- j. Markham staff

5. Communications Objectives

- I. Education/awareness of Markham Council and staff, and Markham residents regarding:
 - a. Current situation; highlight extent of the destruction from EAB and December 2013 ice storm, clearly communicating the gravity of the situation
 - b. Key elements of Markham's EAB Management Plan; monitoring, treatment, removal and replanting programs
 - c. Markham next steps and timing re. ash trees on municipal property
 - d. Tree preservation by-law change, if applicable
 - e. Importance of taking action now re. dead/hazardous ash trees on their private property
 - f. Treatment and removal options available re. ash trees on residents' private property
 - g. Options for planting/replanting on private property to help increase the urban tree canopy – *Trees for Tomorrow*; *The Greenprint Community Sustainability Plan*, LEAF backyard tree planting program
 - h. Disposal protocol
 - i. Opportunity to treat City boulevard ash tree(s) adjacent to their property not identified as treatable by the City

6. Key Messages

General

- a. Public safety and due diligence are of the highest priority for the City of Markham.



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- b. Markham's urban forest has suffered devastating losses due to EAB and the December 2013 ice storm with 3,100 dead and hazardous trees already removed this year, and another 6,000 to be removed before the end of 2014.
- c. Markham will undertake an unprecedented replanting program in 2015 once dead and hazardous trees are removed and stumped.
- d. Markham is conducting an inventory and risk assessment of all species of trees on city-owned property to determine the current composition of Markham's urban forest, and develop a strong and diverse replanting program to mitigate the damage posed by future invasive pests.
- e. To ensure we limit the impact of any future pest infestations that may occur, it is extremely important Markham undertakes a strategic approach to replanting to ensure a variety of tree species are planted under optimum environmental conditions (soil type, adequate space for planting and root growth, etc.) in each impacted neighbourhood.
- f. Markham is working in partnership with York Region to coordinate efforts in addressing this issue.
- g. EAB affects ash trees only.
- h. Ash trees located on private property are the responsibility of the property owner and dead or hazardous ash trees should be removed right away.
- i. Markham has moved quickly and in a responsible manner in response to EAB infestation and considered among the best in Ontario.
- j. Detecting EAB is usually only possible after the beetle has been present for several years, as evidenced in almost all municipalities in Canada and the U.S. working to manage EAB.

Actions Taken To-date

- a. The City has taken the necessary steps to determine the extent of the infestation on municipally-owned land through:
 - i. Years of best-practice education about how to detect the EAB
 - ii. Mapping City ash tree locations (early 2008)
 - iii. Partnering with the Region to set traps to determine if EAB was present in our communities (May 2011)



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- iv. Participation on Joint Technical EAB Work Group with Region and eight other municipalities (formed 2011)
- v. implementation of a branch sampling program (January to April 2012),
- vi. An initial ash boulevard and park tree inventory and tree health assessment (May to August 2012)
- vii. A tree injection pilot project in Ashton Meadows Park (August 2012).
- viii. Annual tree health assessments to determine the rate of decline in all identified ash trees. 2014 assessment completed (July 2014).
- ix. Hired respected and knowledgeable staff to manage the plan.
- b. The results from our branch sampling, boulevard tree inventory and health assessment programs, and our pilot injection treatment in Ashton Meadows Park, enabled Markham to assess the Emerald Ash Borer's environmental, aesthetic and financial impact on our community.
 - x. Environmental impact – canopy reduction
 - xi. Aesthetic impact
 - xii. Financial impact – cost of treatment, removal, disposal and replanting of affected trees.
- c. The first phase of Markham's inventory and tree health assessment program started as soon as the trees began to leaf out in spring 2012 - a critical best-practice step required before taking action and developing a management plan.

EAB Management Plan

- a. Best practices from other North American municipalities that have been managing EAB for many years were accessed through expertise hired by the City to assist in the development of Markham's EAB Management Plan.
- b. Markham has developed an efficient, effective and sustainable Emerald Ash Borer management plan (Fall 2012).
- c. Markham's EAB Management Plan is designed to protect the environmental, social, health and economic benefits of our urban forest.
- d. Markham is committed to an EAB Management Plan that preserves our tree canopy through maintenance and management, and recognizes the social,



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- economic and environmental value of our trees in an environmentally, socially and fiscally responsible manner.
- e. The City's plan builds on the best practices of other municipalities and utilizes expertise to make informed and appropriate decisions in a transparent manner.
- f. Markham will preserve as many ash trees as possible based on informed criteria.
- g. Markham is committed to increasing the urban tree canopy, as identified in Markham's Greenprint Community Sustainability Plan, and is partnering with *Trees for Tomorrow*, the Urban Tree Canopy.
- h. The City is committed to refinement and implementation of its EAB Management Plan, which responds to the environmental challenge of the EAB infestation while incorporating new information, research and management strategies, and demonstrating fiscal responsibility.

7. Strategy

- a. Proactively inform Markham council and staff, and Markham residents of the steps Markham is currently taking to address this crisis and reassure them City staff are working diligently on next steps, in particular, implementation of the City's Emerald Ash Borer Management Plan
- b. Provide residents with resources that explain:
 - i. What the EAB is
 - ii. How to identify an ash tree
 - iii. How to hire a qualified, reputable arborist to manage ash trees on their private property
 - iv. The importance of removing dead and hazardous ash trees on their private property right away
 - v. What they can do to help care for newly planted trees on City boulevards
- c. Clearly communicate to residents key aspects of Markham's EAB Management Plan presented to General Committee 19 November 2012 including:
 - i. When and how the City is preserving City ash trees based on best practices and manufacturers recommendations



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- ii. When and how the City is removing, stumping and replanting City trees adjacent to their homes and in their manicured parks that are dead or in significant health decline
 - iii. Opportunity for residents to treat City ash tree(s) adjacent to their private property at their own expense
- d. Update residents on:
 - i. The current status of Markham's boulevard ash trees as a result of EAB and the December 2013 ice storm
- e. Provide Markham Council with pre-packaged information they can use to communicate with their constituents
- f. Provide Markham Senior Staff and Contact Centre with pre-packaged information they can use to respond to stakeholder concerns

8. Tactics

- a. Council updates – via written reports and presentations, as needed
- b. Advertising on Markham city pages, and via other print media outlets (mainstream and ethnic) that drives residents to markham.ca and social media sites for more information
- c. EIBs
- d. Press releases
- e. Direct marketing materials; e.g. door hangers/brochures/postcards for distribution to City residents, impacted property owners in particular:
 - i. Those with ash trees designated for treatment or removal and replanting – how, why, when
 - ii. Those with ash trees on their private property – provide resource information to assist them with best-practice options for treatment and encourage them to remove dead and hazardous ash trees on their private property
 - iii. Tags on Treegator bags at base of newly planted trees on City boulevards



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- f. Leverage portal to allow residents to:
 - i. Obtain current information on the health of the boulevard tree(s) adjacent to their homes, using GIS links
 - ii. Submit a “notification” regarding their boulevard tree(s) if they wish to treat, and pay for the treatment of, their boulevard tree(s) the City has identified as untreatable
 - iii. Connect with third-party resources
 - iv. Obtain updates on Markham current state/next steps/EAB Management Plan programs
 - v. Get answers to frequently asked questions
- g. Social media – Twitter, Facebook, YouTube to share information updates, deliver advocacy/informational/instructional videos and drive residents to markham.ca for details
 - i. Mayor’s video – posted in 2013
 - ii. Resident advocacy video – scheduled for posting September 2014
 - iii. City staff SME video – scheduled for posting October 2014
- h. Article(s) in Markham Life magazine that provide information and updates as the production schedule permits
 - i. Winter 2014 – EAB Management Plan implementation update
- i. Public meetings and other engagement tactics, as required
 - i. Jan/Feb 2013 – communication information meetings (5)
 - ii. Spring 2015 – Let’s Talk Trees