

# Summary:

The previous ash management policy has undergone a significant change. Previously, the HOA paid to treat only “front yard” trees. Home owners could choose to treat additional trees at their expense. Once diseased, remaining trees would be removed and replaced at HOA expense.

At the January 2019 board meeting the board members voted to treat all of the ash trees at HOA expense.. There are likely to be a few exceptions for wind damaged trees and trees that are a hazard near high wire lines or property lines.

The justification for this change follows in the “analysis” section of this report.

# Analysis:

The emerald ash borer is a major threat to the ash trees in The Greens. It is only a question of “when” (not “if”) the insect will kill our untreated trees. The Greens has a total of 40 ash trees, 18 in front yards and the remaining 22 in back yards mainly along the periphery. All were planted when The Greens was developed and are generally in excellent condition. A healthy ash tree is expected to live more than 75 years.

The current strategy is to treat the front yard trees at HOA expense. Four owners have stepped forward to treat five trees at their expense in their back yards. The remaining untreated 17 trees will eventually die and need to be removed and replaced at HOA expense.

According to the Rochester city forester Jeff Haberman, the borer has made major inroads into the SW quadrant of the city and is rapidly encroaching into the NW quadrant.

The purpose of this report is to compare the current strategy with an alternative plan where the HOA would treat all of the trees. Assumptions critical to this analysis are:

- treatment cost
- treatment duration
- tree removal and stump grinding cost
- tree replacement cost

Doug Courneya, a certified arborist, has treated the trees with ArboMectin which is applied into roots of the trees and has a minimal impact on the surrounding environment. It has been proven to be nearly 100% effective. It is applied every two years and treatment is due again in 2019. The cost depends upon the size of the tree (its trunk diameter) and the surrounding soil. In 2017 the average cost per tree was \$130 for a yearly cost of \$65. This cost will of course increase as the trees continue to grow. For analysis purposes I will use \$75 per tree per year.

The required treatment duration is much harder to estimate. The most common responses in the literature are “indefinitely”, “several years”, or “until all of the insects have left the area”. The reality is that no one knows for sure and few will adventure a guess. For analysis purposes I will use 16 years which seems like a reasonable estimate from various Internet reports. It is possible that treatment may be moved to a three-year rotation late in the treatment process.

The cost of removal and stump grinding depend upon the size and location of the tree. A report from the city of Rochester suggests nearly \$3000, which seems too high when applied to the trees in The Greens. The costs to remove various trees (mainly in front yards) have been significantly less. For analysis purposes I will use \$1600.

Tree replacement costs will vary significantly depending of the tree species, size, and location. From past experience \$300 is a reasonable purchase and planting cost. Not all areas may require a replacement tree, but I will assume full replacement.

The total cost to the HOA of the current plan over 16 years is \$53,900:

- 18 treated trees at \$75 per tree per year
- 17 removed trees at \$1600 per tree
- 17 replacement trees at \$300 per tree
- Note that with this plan 5 trees are treated at owner’s expense

The total cost to the HOA of a plan to treat all trees over 16 years is \$48,000:

- 40 treated trees at \$75 per tree per year

As a reference point the cost to remove all of the trees with full replacement is \$76,000.

Given the uncertainty of the various parameters such as treatment duration and removal costs, there is little to distinguish between the costs of the two plans. The results reported from a search of the Internet vary greatly. The city of Rochester (with its high tree removal costs and three-year treatment rotation) claims that “two trees can be treated for 20 years at the price it would take to remove and replace a single tree”. A report from the Urban Tree Alliance suggests that it costs less to “simply remove a tree if the treatment duration exceeds 9 years”.

Each plan has its advantages and disadvantages. The current plan transfers some of the costs to owners. However, there is no guarantee that the treatment would continue with new owners. Since both treatment and removal are involved, the overall risk may be reduced. A better diversity of tree species will result as replacement trees are planted.

The plan to treat all trees spreads the costs over a longer period of time. The Greens would continue to enjoy all of its large ash trees. However, if major wind damage occurs to a treated tree after several years, the removal costs along with the treatment costs result. This plan would take full advantage of any breakthroughs in treatment methodology.