

MEMO

To: Josh Arneson, Richmond Town Manager

From: Caitlin Littlefield, Richmond Tree Warden

Date: November 12, 2024

Re: **Anticipated tree work on municipal lands and within the town right-of-way for FY26**

The estimated FY26 expenses for carrying out necessary tree work around Richmond ranges from \$18,600 - \$29,400. This range was informed by the cost of work in recent years (described below). As such, it does not account for unforeseen events like severe ice storms that may necessitate considerably more tree work in any given year.

2024 Tree work at Richmond's library and parks

Work carried out in the spring and summer of 2024 around municipal lands is a reasonable proxy for future years. Some of this work had been deferred and was overdue such that 2024 could represent a "local maximum" with respect to the volume of necessary tree work. However, more consistent and proactive monitoring, pruning, and strategic removals/replacements on a yearly basis are the best guarantee to a beautiful, healthy, and low-hazard municipal tree canopy. This is particularly true in the face of the emerald ash borer (EAB), which will continue to kill—and render quite hazardous—most of Richmond's ash trees.

Specifically, in 2024, Richmond's Tree Warden advanced multiple tree work projects with the Three Parks Committee and with the RFL Library Trustees. In all cases, work was carried out by ISA-certified arborists (Acer). Objectives around the library included removals and pruning to facilitate building restoration and improve air flow to mitigate moisture problems on the north side of the building. Objectives at the three parks—around the Round Church, at Volunteers Green, and at Brown's Court—included reducing hazards and improving tree health and aesthetics via select removals/replacements (targeting dead or declining trees) and substantial pruning. Stumps were ground for all removals. *In total, this work cost approximately \$15,000.*

2020-2022 Tree work in response to the emerald ash borer

As noted above, most of Richmond's ash trees will continue to succumb to EAB. A volunteer-led inventory of roadside ash trees in 2020 tallied ash trees within the public right-of-way (ROW) along 20 miles of Richmond's roads. Ash tree density varies widely: some upland areas have 95-125 ash trees per road mile, whereas other stretches along fields and pastures have far fewer. Of the 874 trees inventoried, approximately 215 were 12-24" in diameter and 45 exceeded 24" in diameter. Richmond's Tree Warden, Road Foreman, and ISA-certified arborists (Limbwalker) identified priority trees for removal that were too large or complicated for the highway department to address. The arborist was hired on a per-day basis at \$3600/day to remove trees within the public ROW on Cochran Rd and Dugway Rd, and *the total cost was approximately \$19,000.* The precise number of trees removed is not known, but it was likely 20-24. Note that

these were nearly all live removals; declining and dead ash are extremely brittle and dangerous such that it will be increasingly more costly to remove trees within the public ROW.

In addition to those ROW removals—along with six other removals and replacements elsewhere in the village—21 ash trees were selected for treatment with a targeted insecticide (emamectin benzoate). These include trees within the village (eg in front of the Town Center) and at the entrance to the Andrews Community Forest. Treatment is highly effective at protecting ash trees but needs to occur indefinitely every two years. The most recent treatment (by Limbwalker) was carried out in 2023 on 21 trees (approximately 300 inches in diameter) at a cost of \$12/diameter for a total of \$3600. The next treatment should occur in the spring of 2025.

Anticipated FY26 expenses

These expenses from recent years form the basis of the estimated \$18,600 - \$29,400 for tree work in Richmond in FY26. These numbers were calculated as follows:

- \$18,600 = \$15,000 (cost of park and library work in 2024) + \$3,600 (EAB treatments)
- \$29,400 = \$15,000 (cost of park and library work in 2024) + \$3,600 (EAB treatments) + 3*\$3,600 (3-days' worth of roadside ash removals)

The upper estimate accounts for ongoing roadside ash removals, which is advisable because, as noted above, declining and dead ash are increasingly more expensive to remove. If an arborist is hired for fewer than three days, that sum would decrease.

Note that it is highly possible, and perhaps probable, that the cost of a day's worth of removals has increased since the work was carried out. However, bundling all municipal tree work into one contractor with a single provider may help mitigate cost increases.

Finally, it is important to note that these estimates represent proactive efforts to maintain Richmond's tree canopy. To carry out the "bare minimum" of tree work that is reactive to hazards that arise would be less expensive. However, such an approach would likely lead to greater accumulated costs in the future, could compromise public safety, and would undermine our ability to maintain a thriving municipal tree canopy now and for many years to come.

Caitlin Littlefield