



Trees with a Future

Success Stories

Forestry Topic 37

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Municipal Wood Waste

One of the greatest sources of municipal wood waste is the communities that dot the Virginia landscape. From small towns such as Woodstock, to larger municipalities like Harrisonburg, thousands of tons of wood are extracted from these urban forests due to storm damage, purposeful tree removal to accommodate expanding grey infrastructure, and natural tree mortality. In light of climate change, improving economies, and the arrival of invasive insects such as the emerald ash borer, the number of trees removed from our urban forest landscape will substantially increase, possibly to exponential proportions.

A Plan for Waste

Until recently, many communities across Virginia lacked purposeful plans for their urban trees after removal. The prevailing vision was that when the tree was at the end of its usefulness, the tree was cut down and disposed of, end of story. Only minor consideration was given to what should happen to a tree as it transitioned from a living plant to standing dead wood. Over the past two years, the Virginia Urban Wood program has been able to guide communities in a new direction, resulting in a more positive outcome for many of their urban trees, which must be removed for reasons of public safety or an ever-expanding urban hardscape.

Town of Woodstock

The Town of Woodstock, with a population of 5,300, already possessed a very active town-sponsored Tree Board and a municipal staff that was very engaged in the urban forestry program. The town had most of the pieces in place for a complete municipal tree-cycling program creating compost for town planting projects from municipal leaf collections, making chips from larger pruned branches for use on trails in parks and in playgrounds, and generating firewood from larger pruned branches or trees not suited to a higher,



Woodstock Urban Wood, Lemuel Hancock, Urban Designer and Neighborhood Planner

more valuable use. However, the program needed to develop more contacts and marketing opportunities for the trunks of these municipal trees that contained the most valuable wood. The Virginia Urban Wood Program assisted Woodstock by providing them with new opportunities for milling and marketing these urban trees. Lemuel Hancock, Woodstock's town planner, recently stated, "The addition of sawmillers and crafters has truly completed our circle of tree-cycling, allowing us to keep locally-grown wood within our community."

Woodstock also recently included urban wood as a part of their strategic plan with a goal of "Preserving the town for future generations by creating a sustainable environment – creating an urban tree utilization program and educational outreach on urban wood reuse". The Virginia Urban Wood Program continues to work with the Town of Woodstock as they develop their Urban Wood Best Management Practices. The town's overall goal of complete tree-cycling will utilize

all parts of the tree from the time it is planted, through the final removal of the tree.

City of Harrisonburg

Harrisonburg is 10 times as large as Woodstock, with a population of 53,000 citizens. While Woodstock has occasional tree removals, Harrisonburg's city maintenance crews harvest trees several times per month. Obviously, this more frequent harvesting schedule is partly due to the sheer size of this metro area. Concurrently, with a higher percentage of ash trees in their urban forest, Harrisonburg is feeling the full impact of the destructive emerald ash borer and therefore experiencing greater tree mortality than in Woodstock.

The City of Harrisonburg requested the Virginia Department of Forestry's (VDOF) help to manage the invasive emerald ash borer. Noticing present tree mortality issues, and the potential for even greater impacts on their urban forest, Harrisonburg and the VDOF developed a strategy to alleviate the losses from this unwanted pest. The initial outreach effort familiarized city staffers with the present and potential impact of the emerald ash borer. This gathering also familiarized the audience with Harrisonburg's partnership with James Madison University to conduct an inventory of all publicly-owned trees. As a result of this gathering, and, the leadership of urban wood advocate and Parks Superintendent Jeremy Harold, Harrisonburg now has a flourishing Urban Wood Program.

In the spring of 2018, Harrisonburg staff sponsored "Urban Trees in the Age of the Emerald Ash Borer", an



Harrisonburg educational poster



Harrisonburg wood crafters

event at Court Square Theater to help educate the public about the city's efforts and help foster relationships between local businesses, woodworkers and architects. The event included public outreach by the VDOF, displays of woodcrafts made by local artisans, a survey board to collect public input on how they would like to see wood used in the community, and a screening of "Felled", a documentary about giving new life to fallen urban trees.

Future Planning

Similar to Woodstock, Harrisonburg has also incorporated urban wood and tree-cycling into their future vision for a greener city. Recently, the municipality included the following language in their comprehensive plan: "To develop a waste wood utilization program, in partnership with interested agencies and organizations, to recover wood products from fallen or removed trees so that the wood could be reused in creative ways and kept from going into landfills."

"Incorporating urban wood and tree-cycling into future planning for the city truly boosts our urban wood efforts in Harrisonburg and helps us to chart a path of sustainability well into the future" says Jeremy Harold.



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