

Ash trees to be repurposed as Main Street mulch

The spread of the emerald ash borer (EAB) across Iowa has led to the destruction of thousands of ash trees. While the pest has not shown up in Ames yet, hundreds of trees have been removed here in a proactive move by the city. Now a partnership between the Main Street Cultural District (MSCD) and the City of Ames is giving rise to something positive out of those ashes. The trees are being turned into mulch that will be used to beautify flower beds in historic downtown Ames.

“The fact that the MSCD can use the ash tree mulch to beautify such a vital part of the Ames community shows that although we are losing the ash tree population, the ash trees can still have a lasting benefit to the City in other ways,” said Justin Clausen, City of Ames Public Works Operations Manager.

Clausen explains the trees on public property are the responsibility of the City. This means any one of the city’s 2,300 ash trees that become diseased or damaged is a potential liability for the City and ultimately the citizens of Ames.

“We are removing weak, damaged, and young ash trees right now,” Clausen said. “At the same time we will be treating selected healthy ash trees to prevent the spread of the EAB.”

The goal is not to save the ash trees, as efforts to do this in other communities have shown to be unsuccessful. Instead the city is trying to prolong the lives of the healthy ash trees, spreading out the removals over a longer period of time to limit the impact to the urban canopy, and replacing the trees that are cut down with new trees.

So far, 600 ash trees have been removed in year two of a twenty year removal plan. Those trees are turned into mulch for the residents of Ames to use. This spring, a large part of that mulch will be trucked to downtown Ames for a Main Street mulching day.

“Mulch is something we would normally have to buy, so this saves us quite a bit of money,” said Cindy Hicks, MSCD Executive Director. “But more importantly, it ensures the ash trees, that so many people love, will continue to provide beauty to the community.”

Hicks says the MSCD could use a few volunteers with rakes, wagons, and wheel barrows to help spread the mulch from 5 to 7 p.m. on April 21. You can sign up by [clicking](#) here.