

Metamora waits on spring thaw to determine tree loss

METAMORA – The waiting game is almost over at Metamora Memorial Park. In the spring village officials will be able to determine whether they'll lose 41 of the park's trees to a summer act of vandalism.

If that's the case, they'll have to decide how the village can afford to replace them.

"Financially, the village isn't in any position to purchase any trees in this point in time," said Sue Clendenin, village deputy clerk.

On the evening of July 31, 2009, she and village council member Karon Lane were walking through the park along Memorial Drive. They quickly noticed that every tree lining the east side of the drive had been "girdled" – cut through the bark completely around the circumference. Two others in the park's memorial garden were similarly damaged.

With the help of a sheriff's officer, more cut trees were discovered the next day. A total of 41 were listed as suffering cuts one-fourth inch wide and one-half inch deep by what appeared to be a small circular saw. Around a dozen of those had been planted as memorials at a cost of between \$250 and \$600 apiece.

"A lot of people were in shock," Clendenin said.

But the bad news wasn't over.

After inspecting the damage, an arborist from New Century Tree and Lawn Care of Wauseon and his associate determined that conductive tissue beneath the tree bark designed to carry water and nutrients to the canopy had been severed on all the affected trees. His prognosis: They would all likely die.

"They had never heard of anyone committing such a malicious act on a tree, and they had to come and see for themselves," Clendenin said.

A second investigation by a Toledo arborist confirmed the trees would not recover.

Some did die rather quickly. "The smaller ones really started wilting rapidly. Within a month leaves dropped off them prematurely," she said.

The village was told it must wait until Spring 2010 to witness the full effect of the vandalism.

"We tried watering them, anything to try to help," Clendenin said. A village resident applied a tar solution to several of the trees in an effort to save them.

Should all the trees die the total damage will be estimated at approximately \$20,000. Their number will be added to 21 other park trees killed by the emerald ash borer.

All told, approximately half of the park's trees would be dead.

Because the village is financially unable to replace them, it would have to look for state grant money for assistance, Mayor Gary Loar said.

Since the vandalism, the village has installed about \$7,500 in surveillance equipment throughout the park. An area Crimestopper program offered a \$1,000 reward for information about the perpetrators, but the case is still open.

Until the spring thaw, the fate of the trees remains unknown. And Loar is frankly puzzled over why anyone would commit such a senseless crime in the first place.

"They're really hurting the community. I think we have a real nice park compared to other communities, and we take a lot of pride in it," he said. "I just don't understand why anyone would do something so stupid."