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## Replacing felled trees

### BIG PUSH TO PLANT TREES WHERE BEETLES ROAMED

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**WORCESTER** — While the federal government is going to help replace many of the thousands of trees coming down to eradicate the Asian longhorned beetle in Worcester and four adjacent towns, a homegrown initiative with additional tree plantings over the next five years is being organized by community groups.

Lt. Gov. Timothy P. Murray and U.S. Rep. James P. McGovern, D-Worcester, who have been working with local organizations to launch the effort, said the public-private partnership will involve school groups, neighborhood organizations, local environmental and civic and business groups to raise money to plant on streets, in yards and park areas.

“We think it is time to undertake a massive public-private tree planting initiative and we are going to call on community and neighborhood organizations and foundations to participate,” said Mr. Murray, a former Worcester mayor.

“Government can’t do this alone, and we think people are galvanized and want to do something,” in response to the extraordinary tree-cutting to combat the beetle, he said.

“The goal is to plant 30,000 trees over the next five years,” Mr. Murray said.

The program is being launched just as the state and U.S. Department of Agriculture have begun cutting down as many as 300 trees per day to deal with the infestation. Residents are seeing neighborhoods long lined with treasured trees being cut nearly bare in some places, officials said.


While initially some 6,000 infested trees have been targeted, state officials have said as many as 16,000 trees could be cut down over the next several years in Worcester, Shrewsbury, West Boylston, Boylston and Holden.

In the Burncoat area of the city, where substantial cutting got started last week, Mr. Murray said, “We can now see the visual impact from what is coming down and it is stunning.”

“Everyone in the city of Worcester and the impacted towns can relate to what is at stake here,” he added.

“We are not going to just sit by and sulk. We are going to respond in a positive way,” Mr. McGovern said, adding that he and Mr. Murray will try to maximize state and federal contributions. Over the next five years, the congressman said, the federal government expects to spend more than \$100 million on cutting and replacing trees in the project area.

Mr. Murray and Mr. McGovern together are donating \$10,000 from their campaign funds to seed the project and have committed to



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raising money from local groups and businesses.

Mr. Murray said the initial planning and development will be coordinated by Peggy Middaugh, executive director of the Regional Environmental Council, and Paul Belsito of Worcester, most recently an aide to former state Sen. Edward M. Augustus Jr.

State and federal agencies are also expected to assist in the project.

While the USDA plans to replace cut trees with small, young saplings, residents are concerned it may take decades for them to grow to full size. Mr. Murray said state and federal money also has limitations, and the supplemental public-private effort will provide more flexibility over the number, size and types of trees that can be used to restore the urban forest.

Mr. McGovern said the supplemental community effort will allow neighborhoods and communities to take control of the tree replenishment steps instead of having "someone from Washington" determining what trees will be planted and how many.

"This will let neighborhoods and cities and towns be involved in deciding what happens next," Mr. McGovern said, while also providing educational and environmental benefits that will be long lived.

A community meeting will be held Jan. 29 for people to offer ideas and guide the program's development, Mr. McGovern said.

Mr. Murray said talks are under way with the Massachusetts Audubon Society, the Greater Worcester Land Trust and REC for using their organization's nontaxable contribution accounts for donations. The donations will be raised in a variety of ways, from lunch counter cans to school drives and potluck suppers, as well as donations from local businesses and civic organizations.

"No contribution of time or money will be too small," he said, and area children and adults are going to be able to pitch in, "get their hands dirty" and do some of the actual planting work.

Even before the beetle eradication program began last year, Mr. Murray said, the city was experiencing heavy losses in the tree canopy that has accented neighborhoods, shaded streets and sidewalks and enhanced the quality of public and private property across the city.

He cited local author Evelyn Herwitz's 2001 book, "Trees at Risk: Reclaiming the Urban Forest," which estimated that the city had steadily lost publicly owned trees through much of the 20th century as the numbers fell from 50,000 to only 20,000 at the turn of the millennium.

Fiscal restraints limited Worcester to replanting only one tree for every four that were removed or died.

That call to restore the city's trees, Mr. Murray said, showed a need for the tree planting push even before the beetles from Asia were discovered last year.

He said community tree planting programs were undertaken in the past in Worcester, once after a major ice storm in 1923 and again after the 1953 tornado destroyed trees in a wide swath across the city.

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