Department of Natural Resources
ohiodnr.gov

Mike DeWine, *Governor*
Jim Tressel, *Lt. Governor*
Mary Mertz, *Director*

Steph Miller, Western Ohio Urban Forestry Coordinator
Division of Forestry
forestry.ohiodnr.gov
June 19, 2025

952-B Lima Ave.
Findlay, OH 45840
(419) 429-8313
stephanie.miller@dnr.ohio.gov

The Honorable Lora Lyons
Mayor of Payne
119 N Main St.
PO Box 58
Payne, OH 45880

Dear Mayor Lyons,

Thank you very much for inviting me to Payne. We got a lot done in a short time. The primary goal was to do a tree risk assessment followed by a village street tree planting design. Payne has so much potential for a healthy, beautiful tree canopy. It's exciting that you're thinking about future generations. The following is a summary of the risk assessment with some management recommendations.

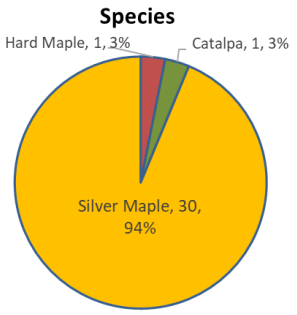
Process

The goal of the tree risk assessment inventory was to identify high risk trees by doing a Level 1 Enhanced Tree Risk Assessment. All trees were inspected visually from the ground by walking around the tree and looking at it from top to bottom. For a tree to be hazardous it must meet two criteria: 1) a high potential to fail in a three-year timeline *and* 2) targets such as pedestrians, vehicles, homes, structures, etc. We identified all conditions of concern that may contribute to tree failure within 3 years as well as the tree's location, target damage potential, and risk mitigation need. If the tree posed a low risk of failing onto a target or causing significant damage, it was not recorded.

Findings

This section covers what we found, general trends, and some explanations for the trends.

We identified a total of 31 trees that require risk mitigation and 1 that should be monitored post storm/wind events. Most of the trees designated as high risk were silver maples. That is not necessarily a sign that silver maples are bad street trees. In fact, they are really tough in the urban environment. Silver maple was the dominant species for the longest period of time and they were abused repeatedly back in the day when topping was practiced.



Nearly all the trees we recorded had been topped. Topping is the indiscriminate cutting of branches. This outdated practice has taken its toll on your trees. Most of the dead wood, hollow, and large,

Steph Miller, Western Ohio Urban Forestry Coordinator
Division of Forestry
forestry.ohiodnr.gov
June 19, 2025

952-B Lima Ave.
Findlay, OH 45840
(419) 429-8313
stephanie.miller@dnr.ohio.gov

weak sprouts have resulted from old topping and the type of wounding it does to a tree. We are likely to see the trees on this list begin or continue to have upper branches break around the old topping wounds. Fortunately, many branches break and hang or fall onto lower branches to slow their fall or catch them. However, these failures tell us that the strength loss in the topped branches has reached a point where they begin to buckle. It's a domino effect. I suspect that much of your past storm damage is directly related to these practices as well. Most storm damage is preventable with proper tree selection and care. Topping and lions-tailing (removing all the interior branches) predispose trees to wind, ice, and snow damage.

The structure of several trees is also a problem. Most trees we inspected had unnaturally large crowns with multiple trunks, which is typical of untrained trees grown in the open. The structure of the trees sets them up for problems in maturity because multiple trunks often create poor branch unions (tight, V-shaped crotches) and dense crowns subject to wind and ice damage. Some middle-aged trees aren't high risk now but will be some day just because of their poor form. We now know how to "train" young trees so that they grow up to be quality pieces of our urban infrastructure.

The most striking discovery was the amount of root cutting for the recent street and water line/sewer work. Roots hold trees up; so when they are severed so close to the trunk, we have a very serious situation that may result in total tree failure. Therefore, the risk to traffic, surrounding structures, and the disturbance whole tree failures create for emergency vehicles is significantly more problematic than dropping branches. Added to that, wind protection from neighboring trees has been removed as part of the water/sewer work. Even more wind protection will be removed as a result of your tree risk mitigation efforts. In other words, the wind patterns have changed, so the remnant trees are getting wind they have not grown up to tolerate.

Our time in the field gave us an opportunity to discuss trees that aren't a high or extreme risk, but aren't in the best condition either. Most are ones you can remove after you have your risk mitigation work finished and you're on a routine removal cycle. You'll have shored up your foundation and now you can start remodeling some rooms. One tree is a private tree that perhaps the village may want to address.

Risk Mitigation Recommendations

For this inventory we have three treatments: removal, pruning, & monitoring. Most of the list is classified as removal because the damage/decline is so extensive that no pruning options are available to make the trees structurally sound.

Steph Miller, Western Ohio Urban Forestry Coordinator
Division of Forestry
forestry.ohiodnr.gov
June 19, 2025

952-B Lima Ave.
Findlay, OH 45840
(419) 429-8313
stephanie.miller@dnr.ohio.gov

The next step was to sort the list by priority levels. Priority 1 trees are those that need immediate attention (over the next year.) Priority 2 trees are next, and Priority 3 trees are lowest on the priority list. We assigned priorities based on the probability of the tree to fail and targets. In some cases, trees with very similar conditions might be prioritized differently due to contrasting traffic/pedestrian volumes, size of potential failure, or different target conditions or value. For example, higher use areas typically get higher priorities.

14 (44%) of the trees in this inventory are Priority 1 removals. 11 (34%) are Priority 2 removals. 5 (16%) are Priority 3 removals. 1 tree (3%) is designated Do Not Remove (DNR). The Village can mitigate risk with some pruning. One tree just needs monitoring for any changes after you get hefty winds.

Once sorted by priorities, I sorted the groups by the type and amount of damage. For example, trees with root damage, rot, dead wood, and cracks are higher on the list than those with v-crotches or just hollow. Trees with evidence of root damage and leans are rated higher than trees with other conditions of concern. Cracks were limited to cracks in the wood itself, not bark cracks. Cracks are an identified failure in the tree, not just a sign that something is or may be structurally unsound.

Some cells were missing data or had an error, so I looked up some trees on Google Map Street View and did a quick site verification on an evening when passing through the area. I marked all cells that I changed and any blank ones in yellow.

Priorities

1 or 3% Priority 1 Immediate Removal
13 or 41% Priority 1 Removals
11 or 34% Priority 2 Removals
1 or 3% Priority 2 Prune
5 or 16% Priority 3 Removals
1 or 3% Monitor

Findings of Special Note

29 or 94% of trees had been topped
23 or 72% had or are suspected to have roots damaged &/or cut

Risk Mitigation Recommendations

I put the trees in a suggested order for you to address within budgetary constraints starting with the Priority 1 list, then Priority 2, etc. I tried to group together trees of similar risk and locale to help with work efficiency too. This is a time-sensitive inventory intended to allow you to address the trees within 3-4 years, so this priority list increases the odds that you will

Steph Miller, Western Ohio Urban Forestry Coordinator
Division of Forestry
forestry.ohiodnr.gov
June 19, 2025

952-B Lima Ave.
Findlay, OH 45840
(419) 429-8313
stephanie.miller@dnr.ohio.gov

get to all the trees before they fail. You'll have control of the situation, not Mother Nature…she can be unpredictable and expensive.

A reasonable goal is to address Priority 1 trees in 2025-6, the Priority 2 trees within 2-3 years and Priority 3 trees within 3-4 years. If you can address all the trees sooner, then great for you. Still, it will likely take a few years to cycle through the list, but at least there is accountability and system of addressing them. It makes explaining it to the public much easier too.

What's nice about having it in an Excel spreadsheet is that you can sort and filter by streets and track work as it's completed. You may devise lists for removal and pruning contracts based on blocks of the spreadsheet. If you know how many removals you can generally get for a designated dollar amount, then remove the trees you can afford as soon as possible and work through the list as finances allow. This also allows for bulk pricing. You'll typically get a lower price removing multiple trees in contract than removing one at a time.

You only have one tree that needs pruned, so it is important to make sure that whoever does the pruning is ***trained and qualified*** to do so. Therefore, consider separating the removal contract from the pruning contract. Anyone can remove a tree as long as they have liability insurance and Workers Compensation. Not everyone has the know-how, equipment, or training to do proper pruning. Drive the removal costs down through competitive bid and take the savings from that to invest in good pruning.

As a State agent, I am unable to make recommendations for who does good pruning. I can, however, recommend you use a company with International Society of Arboriculture Certified Arborists. You will find a list of Certified Arborists for hire at www.treesaregood.org (search by zip code & 50–75-mile radius.) You are extremely fortunate to be near Fort Wayne where there are many companies with ISA CAs on staff. It is not an insurance policy, but it does help to narrow down the playing field to companies who have and continue to have up-to-date training and prioritize safety.

Topping or lions-tailing should not be options; so, the village must have good pruning specifications. I e-mailed you sample risk mitigation pruning and removal specifications that you may use as guides to develop for Payne. I'll be delighted to work with you to finalize your specifications, help conduct pre or post bid meetings, and inspect the work once the crews begin to make sure they are on the right track if you'd like.

Public Relations

There is no doubt that this is going to impact the citizens of Payne. My experience is that people are passionate about trees – usually only when something drastically changes with

Steph Miller, Western Ohio Urban Forestry Coordinator
Division of Forestry
forestry.ohiodnr.gov
June 19, 2025

952-B Lima Ave.
Findlay, OH 45840
(419) 429-8313
stephanie.miller@dnr.ohio.gov

them. Some streets will look very different because of the removals. Hopefully this inventory will be a powerful tool in justifying these decisions and "selling" the idea to the citizens.

If you have ways to get the word out (website/newsletter/paper/social media,) consider publishing regular information about your tree program. If you see the need to make your case more public, consider publishing pictures of the damage and state specifically why this is an issue. I have found that STRESSING PUBLIC SAFETY is very helpful. I'll be happy to help write things with you – a true benefit of e-mail! If there is a need to look at some of the trees with Village Council, I'll be happy to do so too. The more they know, the easier it will be to complete this phase of your urban forestry program.

One way to show that you are doing something to rectify this situation is to select a couple of high-profile locations for tree planting. Replanting is going to be critical in building public support for this risk mitigation phase. Since most of your tree budget should be designated for tree risk mitigation over the next few years, there may be little to invest in replanting. That's ok. It's better to invest in shoring up your foundation first then building the rest of your home with a quality plan. We (the Ohio Division of Forestry) will continue to work on that at your pace as you request.

Your street tree planting design in tandem with your Tree Risk Assessment is an excellent step too. We've discovered that when citizens see that there is a quality plan to replant trees (even if it's not immediately,) it eases tension and the pain of losing a beloved tree and its quality shade. Your intentions are good.

Inflation Reduction Act Urban Forestry Grant

As mentioned before, we are here for you. Ohio is one of the few states that offers free, objective, professional urban forestry assistance to communities. We also offer grants to towns that have comprehensive urban forestry programs in place. The programs are scaled to the size and local resources, so small communities like Payne have as much of a chance to compete as the largest cities.

We currently have a once-in-a-lifetime grant opportunity that I think you should apply for. It's a no-match grant which is rare also. Awards will cover risk mitigation work and any other urban forest management and planning…all the things you're beginning and are in this report.

The only challenge you may have is qualifying. You know Payne's needs, so I encourage you to make a case for your village's poverty rate and underserved population. Datausa shows that as of 2023 the rate increased by 16%. I'm sure you have access to other measures for grants and other public works funding assistance.

Steph Miller, Western Ohio Urban Forestry Coordinator
Division of Forestry
forestry.ohiodnr.gov
June 19, 2025

952-B Lima Ave.
Findlay, OH 45840
(419) 429-8313
stephanie.miller@dnr.ohio.gov

General Urban Forest Management Recommendations

Here are some things to consider that will help the village have and maintain quality public tree infrastructure:

Right Tree, Right Place: Selecting species that match a site's growing conditions and placing (siting) the trees appropriately will help ensure successful tree establishment and avoid other infrastructure conflicts. You've made a first, giant leap forward by creating a planting design map for the village. By evaluating the treelawns using the Urban Site Index score, we were able to map the size and quality of all your treelawns. I will follow up this report with species recommendations and more details for a spring 2026 tree planting.

Species and Age Diversity: Mixing up your species and planting trees over time protects you from weather events, insect outbreaks, and disease. Your planting design is an excellent tool to help mix things up and phase trees in.

Young Tree Care: Young trees need water, mulch, and training. We will work with you to develop a schedule and processes for making it work for Payne. We teach local staff and tree commissioners how to do young tree training in our free workshops. This is a critical piece in exercising your duty of care to reduce risk with public infrastructure. Heck, we'll be happy to do one in Payne sometime if you're interested.

Risk Mitigation: This is the second highest priority in any infrastructure management. Kudos to you for opting to do this. Once you address the high-risk trees identified in this inventory, you'll only have a few trees each year that need replaced. That is very manageable, and you'll love not having expensive and dangerous storm clean up (or the fear of it.) Peace of mind is underrated – grin.

Planning: This is the top priority in infrastructure management. This inventory and your planting design are excellent starts. They are big steps after decades of neglect. Because it took a long time to get to this point, it'll take a while to stabilize. That's ok. We'll continue working with you at your pace and identify solutions together that fit Payne.

Consider Creating a Tree Commission: Payne has inherited a lot of work. The tree commission system was created in the late 1800s to help local officials manage their public tree infrastructure. This will help ease the pressure on you, your council, and staff. Tree Commissions for towns your size are usually small: 3 or 5 volunteer members with a staff member and council liaison. We work with communities to help get organized with the first task usually being to codify the commission with their ordinance. The next task is usually developing the village tree ordinance. We've got sample tree and commission ordinances that most NW Ohio communities use as their base. In your case, we may focus on the spring 2026

Steph Miller, Western Ohio Urban Forestry Coordinator
Division of Forestry
forestry.ohiodnr.gov
June 19, 2025

952-B Lima Ave.
Findlay, OH 45840
(419) 429-8313
stephanie.miller@dnr.ohio.gov

tree planting. We will work directly with you in Payne to do this stuff. Virtual meetings are useful now too. Our services are by request and we're currently scheduling 2-4 months ahead.

In addition, we have an annual Urban Forestry Conference which is a great way to meet folks from other towns and learn stuff. We have speakers that cover timely topics. We'll be at Bluffton University on October 23rd. Tree Commission Academy is our core education class developed specifically for local officials, staff decision-makers, and tree commissioners. It's a great way to kickstart a program too by getting everyone on the same page. We haven't scheduled our 2026 classes yet, but we'll have two opportunities running in tandem to choose from. If you're interested in being a host branch to help ensure your folks attend, let's talk.

Grants: All the work listed above would fall under the current grant… including attending and/or hosting TCA, risk mitigation, planting, pruning. Even without the current grant, these program activities will prepare you for future grants. Exciting!

Conclusion

I hope that you will find this work helpful in alleviating storm damage and begin the process of growing an even healthier, safer, and beautiful community forest for you and generations to come. One thing that you might find helpful is to record tree failures between now and when you do your risk mitigation. One town that I work with highlights the failure (i.e., DW if dead wood falls out, C if a cracked branch falls, etc.) and puts a date in another column they titled "Failed" and what it cost the village to clean it up (including in-house time which is becoming increasingly valuable with so much on our plates.) The general trend is that trees closest to the top of the list are failing the soonest. It adds another level of credibility to your efforts and is a means to test the risk assessment process.

I've included an Executive Summary for your Village Council. As always, feel free to contact me anytime regarding your tree management activities. Enjoy the spring. Hope to see you again soon.

Sincerely,

Stephanie L. Miller

Steph Miller
Western Ohio Urban Forestry Coordinator
ISA Certified Arborist, Urban Forestry Professional
Tree Risk Assessment Qualified
Ohio Department of Natural Resources

Department of Natural Resources
ohiodnr.gov

Mike DeWine, *Governor*
Jim Tressel, *Lt. Governor*
Mary Mertz, *Director*

Steph Miller, Western Ohio Urban Forestry Coordinator
Division of Forestry
forestry.ohiodnr.gov
June 19, 2025

952-B Lima Ave.
Findlay, OH 45840
(419) 429-8313
stephanie.miller@dnr.ohio.gov

Executive Summary

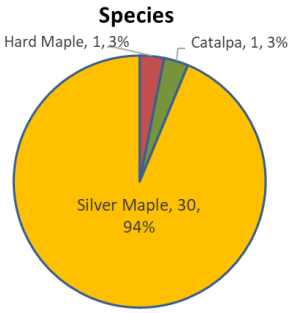
Payne Tree Risk Assessment

Goal: To identify high risk trees on Payne's public rights-of-ways as a means to mitigate risk to Payne's citizens and property in a systematic, measurable way.

Methods: We utilized a Level 1 enhanced visual Tree Risk Assessment. Trees were inspected by Payne's Mayor, Lora Lyons; Stephanie Miller, ODNR, Division of Forestry Urban Forester, International Society of Arboriculture Certified Arborist/Municipal Specialist, & Tree Risk Assessment Qualified; and Haley Belisle, Regional Urban Forester in-training. See attached tree risk inventory tally sheets. Only trees considered high or extreme risk were recorded for this inventory. Trees were evaluated on a 3-year timeline meaning the likelihood of failure was considered for over the next three years.

All data was entered into an Excel spreadsheet and prioritized based on conditions of concern, location, potential damage to target(s,) & tree size. With the trees organized into categories based on highest risk potential, Payne is now able to implement responsible risk mitigation, taking it to a new level of professionalism and quality.

Projected Outcomes: Communities in NW Ohio that have mitigated tree risk potential experience significant reductions in emergency expenses and clean-up costs. In addition, since many NW Ohio high risk trees have been topped (an outdated, unprofessional practice) leading to unnatural leaf volumes, communities often experience reduced leaf collection costs. The replanting and restoration of Payne's village trees will continue to improve the quality-of-life for your citizens via reduced energy costs, reduced stormwater runoff, increased property values/curb appeal, healthier residents, reduced crime/domestic violence, and cleaner air to name a few benefits.



Findings: Many of the trees have been topped and lacked training when young which has led to poorly formed crowns. We identified a significant amount of root cutting for the recent water/sewer replacement which creates a very dangerous situation. We know today that a lot of storm damage is preventable with proper tree care and the elimination of destructive practices such as topping, root cutting, & lions-tailing. The mature tree population is maple heavy.

Priorities

1 or 3% Priority 1 Immediate Removal
13 or 41% Priority 1 Removals
11 or 34% Priority 2 Removals
1 or 3% Priority 2 Prune
5 or 16% Priority 3 Removals
1 or 3% Monitor

Findings of Special Note

29 or 94% of trees had been topped
23 or 72% had or are suspected to have roots damaged &/or cut

Tree Risk Mitigation: A combination of tree removal and proper pruning are components of your mitigation plan. I've supplied a prioritized list of trees in the full report to Mayor Lyons. Its systematic approach should make it easier to address the trees more efficiently and help you budget for it over the next three to four years. We will work with you through all of this.

Steph Miller, Western Ohio Urban Forestry Coordinator
Division of Forestry
forestry.ohiodnr.gov
June 19, 2025

952-B Lima Ave.
Findlay, OH 45840
(419) 429-8313
stephanie.miller@dnr.ohio.gov

Public Relations: Payne's streets will look and feel a lot different with tree canopy loss because of your risk mitigation efforts. It is common for a few citizens to resist tree removal, so these inventories are powerful tools to justify your decisions. Of course, public health and safety is the driving goal of your efforts, and that is a critical message to convey to your residents. Tree planting should be limited until the risk is mitigated and the remaining trees are on a 5-7-year routine pruning cycle. Please avoid public pressure to plant more trees than you can dedicate resources to care for. Let me explain.

In addition to watering and squared off mulch bed maintenance, young trees need training pruned *at least* 3 times during their first 15 years. This critical management strategy significantly heads off many structural issues that predispose trees to storm damage. Therefore, I encourage you to avoid large volume tree plantings and plant only what you can care for. Phasing in 5-10% of your open spaces also helps ensure an age-diverse tree population that prevents large population swings like the one you inherited.

Tree canopy is critical to the health and well-being of humans and communities. Mayor Lyons has begun Payne's street tree planting design. This is an intergenerational design to begin phasing trees back into your treelawns. Whether or not you plant immediately, the village will have a scientifically based design that offers species diversity (protection from insect/disease outbreaks/climate resilience) and a healthier stand of street trees for many decades to come.

We have found that a planting design helps to ease resident discomfort with losing public treelawn trees during your tree risk mitigation program. When citizens see a thoughtful plan to reestablish tree canopy, it builds support for your Urban Forestry program, and they see how they fit into the big picture. It takes a lot of guess work, time, and fear out of annual tree planting decisions as well. It's also made towns much more competitive for our grant programs. Because timing is tight to plan for a fall planting, we have time to prepare for some installations in the spring of 2026.

This is a giant leap forward in your public tree infrastructure management I also suggest creating a 3 or 5 volunteer member tree commission with a staff member and council liaison to advise the Village on your tree program. I also encourage you to apply for our Inflation Reduction Act grant that will cover a lot of the recommendations in your report. The grant application is due in August.

Conclusion: It's been a pleasure working with Mayor Lyons. She has been patient as our program has been addressing a lot of changes – good changes eventually. Ohio is one of the only states that provides free, objective, professional assistance directly to communities on your turf, so you're not alone in your efforts. We look forward to working with Payne as you develop your program. Please call or e-mail me anytime if you have any questions or concerns. Thank you and have a wonderful summer.

Sincerely,

Stephanie L. Miller

Steph Miller
Western Ohio Urban Forestry Coordinator
ISA Certified Arborist, Urban Forestry Professional
Tree Risk Assessment Qualified
Ohio Department of Natural Resources