

More balanced tree bylaw is needed

I've read the debate regarding the proposed tree bylaw and recently attended the proposal of the same to King council. A number of concerns stand out, some of which were touched on by other recent letters to the editor.

The current proposed iteration of a tree bylaw seems to have gained some support as a reaction to radical 'lot clearing' in regards to commercial development in some of the Township villages, in addition to residential clearing. A fairly punitive bylaw was suggested some time ago as a reaction, one that involved the municipality determining what trees could or could not be removed from a property owner's lot, and an obligation to retain an arborist, pay fees, etc. to make changes in trees to their own property. It was eventually decided that the first iteration was a bit 'aggressive' and that reconsideration of a tree bylaw was necessary and that in the meantime an educational component needed to find its way into the tree retention/canopy enhancement discussion.

What is currently being proposed and discussed is only a slightly lighter form of the previous proposed bylaw. The new proposal suggests no permit fee, but an aggressive three-to-one replacement of an existing tree. The land owner removes a tree from their own lot and is obligated to replace that tree with a Township-approved tree or pay for three \$500 trees to be planted elsewhere in the township. So, to be clear, no permit fee but an obligation to do a specific thing on your own lot or to pay a substantial 'tax' or penalty for the right to 'not replace.' What is wrong with choosing to have trees where you do or don't want them? At the end of the day, just how many trees are enough trees?

The proposed bylaw is only directed at the villages. Is this because the 'clear cutting' was objectionable in the village, or because the villages are being singled out to pay for township-wide tree replanting? Why are the agricultural properties not subject to this bylaw, or the residential non-farm properties in the township? Are all residents not responsible for maintaining the tree canopy? If there is to be consideration of a tree bylaw it seems more reasonable and equitable that it apply to all residents, not just the residents of the villages.

The new proposed tree bylaw has, in large part, been influenced by the good folks at Friends of Trees/Concerned Citizens of King Township. CCKT has certainly put some effort into the tree concern and note, as we all do, that most residents love the trees in the King. The entire tree debate is, at its heart, an effort at education. At the same time, CCKT does not speak for all the residents of King Township and are doing so in the inequitable and punitive approach taken in this bylaw proposal.

A more reasonable approach to the bylaw as we move along this process is to ask the public at large what might be a more reasonable approach, one that didn't involve dictating to residents what they can or can't do on their own properties. And one that didn't involve a 'tree tax.'

When it came to council for discussion, I heard councillors suggest alternatives which were employed elsewhere: residents can remove one or two trees a year to avoid the clear cutting; a greater education component; a revised cost structure, etc. The answer is likely to be found in a more balanced approach with a limited tree removal limit per year, combined with a permit fee - the approach to be applied to ALL residents in King.

We all love the trees in King Township, but it has to be recognized that they have a natural and useful life. The canopy is already increasing, not decreasing. Some residents might prefer shrubs and flowering plants, and there needs to be an even greater educational component to maintaining the canopy by all residents.

Special interest groups cannot dictate to homeowners through council what they must do with their own trees.

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