

Township readies its new tree bylaw

By Mark Pavilons

You would think that if you want to remove some trees from your property, it would be simple. Just call a Pawtucket Tree Removal company and get them booked in. But this is not the case if you're in King. And now, years in the making, a new tree bylaw is nearing its final stages.

King councillors heard a staff presentation that provides details of the new, permissive bylaw that relegates trees on private property in King's villages of Schomberg, Nobleton and King City.

Clerk Kathryn Moyle explained the bylaw was first suggested back in 2009 by members of the Environmental Advisory Committee. Subsequent reports to committee followed in 2013 and 2014. It wasn't until last year that Concerned Citizens of King Township (CCKT) suggested a tree focus working group and it then provided presentations to the Sustainability Advisory Committee for feedback. Bi-monthly meetings continues and draft bylaw came to be.

It was determined that a more "permissive" approach was needed. The idea of the bylaw is to protect healthy trees and if landowners were removing them, they had to be replaced.

Staff came up with a 3:1 replacement ratio. The bylaw applies to trees over 20 centimetres in diameter on private property, not including those on woodlands or woodlots. These are covered by York Region bylaws.

Residents who want to destroy or injure a tree on private property must obtain a permit from the Township. There won't be a fee, but the removal has to meet certain criteria, such as the tree being dead or dying; those deemed hazardous and those removed to remediate contaminated soil.

There are exemptions under the bylaw with regards to government and public agencies. Also, most agricultural operations are exempt.

Under the new bylaw, which will likely be finalized this fall, removed trees must be replaced by three newly planted trees (or a cash contribution). The cost that staff estimates per tree is roughly \$500, an average price for native varieties of this size.

Monies paid will be put into a fund for future tree plantings on municipal property.

There are so many intricate details to consider and that's why staff have taken a "robust" community engagement exercise. Hopes are feedback will be received throughout the summer months. As well, the Township will be pushing its key message "King Loves its Trees." The consultation and feedback received will help inform and educate the public before a final decision on the bylaw is made.

Bruce Craig, of Concerned Citizens of King Township, said a central purpose of the proposed tree bylaw is to educate and heighten awareness, something we all benefit from as we seek to be better stewards of trees and forests.

The coming three months is a time of public consultation before a final draft tree bylaw is presented to King Township Council.

"Your thoughtful participation is appreciated. Successful tree management requires the partnership of everyone," he said.

A Snowball resident said she supports the bylaw, but admitted more education is needed.

Mayor Steve Pellegrini stressed "it's all about education." He pointed out it's not meant to be a "punitive" bylaw, but rather a way to make residents think twice before cutting down a living tree.

While it's not a big problem in King, it's important to have rules in place.

Councillor Debbie Schaefer agreed, noting King needs a policy with some regulatory strength in place. She pointed out trees are not the sole property of the owners, but rather they benefit everyone, so there's a bigger picture to consider. One of the reasons people come to King is the abundance of nature, and trees play a huge role in that.

Councillor Bill Cober said the draft bylaw is a "great place to start."

Not everyone is entirely happy with the draft.

In a letter to the Township, Nobleton resident Nancy Hopkinson said she's "totally" opposed to it.

"I have planted many trees on our property over the years. Some were already here when we purchased back in 1974. Over the years, we have removed trees and planted others, but if I had to get a permit each time for each removal, that is a waste of not only my time but also the time of the clerk, who could be doing more useful things.

"Not only that, I object to having to either plant 3 trees of a certain size or pay \$1,500 to have the Township plant 3 trees somewhere else."

Hopkinson pointed out that other jurisdictions have tree bylaws that allow one tree to be removed per year without any permit and without any replacement.

"I am more concerned with people clear cutting the lot to build a monster home, when there is no need to remove all the trees. Yet this bylaw does nothing to address this type of concern.

"This does not seem to be a permissive bylaw. I thought that the intent was to encourage people to plant trees. In my opinion, this discourages people from planting trees. I love trees, but I do not love this bylaw."