

King conference brings awareness to the importance of tree preservation

By Julia Galt

King kicked off the first of what is set to be a series of town hall meetings, with the inaugural theme "Is Every Tree Important." A diverse panel of experts, each with their own professional and personal perspective on the topic, met at King City Secondary School to discuss the importance of conservation both in and out of King Township. The evening's discussions were moderated by Mohammad Totah, recipient of a 2019 King Volunteer Award for his work with King for Refugees. The consensus among the panellists, and the attendees, was that more needs to be done to conserve trees in King Township and beyond. Dr. Laura Westra, professor emerita at the University of Windsor, drew from her knowledge as in her defence of the trees. She condemned land grabbing by corporations, stating that this practice was ruining the earth for future generations. "Cutting down trees is a disaster not only locally, but for humanity," Westra said. Financial planner Avrum Liederman discussed the surprising financial benefits that trees can bring. In the GTA alone, trees provide \$80 million of savings in benefits each year, working out to an average \$125 per household. Even when maintenance costs are factored in, Toronto's trees return between \$1.35 to \$3.20 for every dollar spent on them. The total value of Toronto's urban forest is valued at \$7 billion, averaging \$700 per tree. Additionally, having a home with a tree near the street will add 10-15% to its resale value. Trees are a wise investment in more ways than one. Peter Peter Wynnyczuk, Executive Director of the Ontario Urban Forest Council, also spoke at the event. He discussed the environmental benefits trees bring, from their role in stabilizing sand as shelterbelts in the Dustbowl of the 1930s to their ability to mitigate flooding by collecting moisture. In a time of rapid development for King Township, he cited Mississauga's tree bylaw and commitment to sustaining their tree canopy as the bar to aim for. Atmospheric scientist Dr. Hans Martin stressed the importance of preserving trees in a time when carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere are at the highest in human history. As trees "eat up" carbon dioxide at every age, all are valuable. Martin, a resident of King City, expressed his disappointment in seeing tree stumps, some from trees hundreds of years old, left behind from development work in the town. Wrapping up the evening's speakers was Dr. Riina Bray, director of the Environmental Health Clinic at Women's College Hospital. According to Bray, trees and the environment are critically important to humans even apart from the physical benefits they bring. Citing the Japanese art of forest bathing, surrounding yourself with the energy of nature, Bray stated that prescribing forest time can be extremely beneficial for patients. Exposing yourself to nature reduces stress, boosts mood, speeds recovery from illness, and can help boost the immune system. "We are tied with an umbilical cord to the planet," stated Bray. "We have tried to sever it with technology, and that was our biggest mistake, because now we're killing ourselves." Panellists urged the public to share their needs and opinions with their government. "Each one of you has a voice," stated Wynnyczuk. "And if you join a choir of similar voices you have the power to implement change."