

Updated firearms bylaw will increase public safety

By Angela Gismondi

Public safety was a top priority Monday as King council passed a bylaw to regulate the use of firearms and bows.

Despite opposition from avid recreational hunters, council decided to go ahead and implement the bylaw, which will make it illegal for anyone to discharge a firearm within the boundaries of a defined zone in King City unless they are on agricultural land and/or are protecting their crops and property from wildlife. The boundaries of the prohibited zone include King-Vaughan Line, Bathurst Street, Highway 400 and the 16th Sideroad.

The main change in the bylaw is to expand the existing zone in King City where discharge of firearms is prohibited. The change was implemented to increase public safety of residents living in existing subdivisions and new developments, particularly those adjacent to rural lands where firearms are being discharged.

The new bylaw does not prohibit the discharge of firearms in King City; it creates a more substantial buffer zone between the residential community and the rural community. Overall, the changes are based on safety for the growing and developing community.

Staff presented the proposed Discharge of Firearms bylaw for consideration and adoption by council at the meeting of Nov. 18, 2013. At the meeting deputants raised concerns and posed a variety of questions and regarding the proposed bylaw. As a result, committee moved to defer the item until Monday in order to give staff time to investigate and consider input from local residents. Residents were invited to share their concerns with council with the revised bylaw Monday.

Richard Horne said he wanted to know why Nobleton residents were not given notice about the bylaw revisions. Mayor Steve Pellegrini informed Horne that the only boundaries that were being changed in the discharge of firearms bylaw were the King City boundaries, all the other boundaries will remain the same.

Joe Caldarola was concerned he wouldn't be able to hunt on agricultural land in King City. The land where he usually hunts is now located in the expanded zone on the map. Caldarola has been granted permission to hunt on an agricultural property in King City to control the goose population in the area and keep them from damaging the farmers' crops.

"You have thousands of Canada Geese in that area which you have now extended," he said. "We should go back to the way it was for decades. That whole area is farmland and is not slated for growth. I don't think you should do change until it's necessary. There's no reason to extend it there, it's pretty much a rural area."

Mayor Pellegrini explained that Caldarola can still hunt in that area in order to protect crops if the waterfowl is creating devastation to the crops. If he is doing so for the property owner, he requires written permission.

"You're just not allowed to do it for recreational purposes," explained Pellegrini. "What the bylaw says is within this boundary there is no recreational hunting allowed. You're allowed to protect your property, you're allowed to protect your crops, but there is no recreational hunting. That is the difference."

Township solicitor Tom Halinski added that there is also an exemption in the bylaw for any land being used for agricultural purposes.

Anthony Difebo was happy with some of the changes proposed in the bylaw but also had some concerns. He suggested the boundary should be expanded as development grows.

"The boundary shouldn't be based on where you 'intend' to develop," said Difebo, adding because of the changes in the bylaw he will no longer be able to hunt in King City. "You should wait until future development happens."

He also wanted the bylaw to specify the types of documents a bylaw enforcement officer can ask for if they attend your property after receiving a complaint of a discharge of firearm.

"Making the legislation too explicit is going to tie the hands of the bylaw enforcement officer," Halinski responded. "I think you can be sure that nobody is going to go on a fishing expedition for documents that are not relevant."

YRP inspector Stu Betts also attended the meeting. Although he couldn't speak to the specifics of the bylaw, he did address the increased safety that the updated bylaw provides. He pointed out that in King last year, police received 16 calls for service for gun shots fired in the Township. Of those, three were hunters and lawful gun owners, one was the agent of a farmer and two were fireworks.

"In most cases it doesn't turn out to be anything," said Betts, adding YRP will respond to any calls and enforce federal, provincial and municipal law. "The amendments and expansion of the boundary is really in the interest of public safety ... we support a bylaw like this."

Councillor Peter Grandilli said he was pleased with the bylaw and made a motion to approve it.

“We at council are most concerned about the safety of our residents,” said Grandilli.

Pellegrini pointed out that the review of the bylaw has taken over two years to complete and has been “extremely transparent.” He reiterated the changes are about public safety.

“I have a licence to carry a firearm,” said Pellegrini. “This means you can’t sit on your back porch and recreationally shoot in the village of King City.”

Councillor Linda Pabst,, who lives in the ward with the largest rural area in all of King, was pleased to see a provision for farmers included in the bylaw.

“It protects our villages while allowing our farmers to look after whatever they need to look after to keep their farms going.”

Councillor Bill Cober said the revised bylaw is fair.

“I think the bylaw strikes a reasonable balance,” said Cober. “It’s not ever going to make everyone completely happy.”