

Township approves wayfinding signage program for agri-business

By Angela Gismondi

In response to a recent dispute over signage, the Township is planning to develop a wayfinding signage program to promote agricultural businesses. But the owner of a local honey farm is not satisfied with the proposed solution.

In June, King's bylaw enforcement staff received a complaint regarding a third party sign in violation of the sign bylaw in Nobleton. The sign belonged to Andre Flys who owns and operates Pioneer Brand Honey, located on the 15th Sideroad. With the permission of the property owner, Flys put up a sign at the gas station on Highway 27 and 15th Sideroad to advertise his business and direct potential customers to his apiary. The problem is third party signage is not allowed under the Township's current bylaw, which was updated just last year. As a result, he was asked to remove the sign and to apply for a sign bylaw exemption.

In the process of investigating the matter, Township staff recognized that there is a need for greater signage tools and options beyond what was already included in the new bylaw.

In a report to the Committee of the Whole on July 7, staff recommended that an Agri-Business Wayfinding Signage Program would "benefit agricultural and tourism businesses in King and would provide an appropriate alternative without overriding the principles of the Township's current sign bylaw or the importance of maintaining third party sign prohibitions." The proposed program would feature wayfinding signs at key locations within the Township. Each sign would include space for several agricultural businesses, as well as directions and distances to each location.

However, Flys was hoping staff would recommend reopening and making revisions to the sign bylaw. At the very least, he requested a simple amendment to waive the \$500 sign permit application fee for anyone with a Farm Business Registration number.

"I would like to work with you on this and find ways we (farmers) can incorporate our own ideas because we have some really great ideas. Can you find a way to let us present our ideas without the \$500 fee?" asked Flys, adding the fee is in place to deter some businesses from putting up signage. "I think you have to ask yourselves what you are trying to deter."

He argued that in the short period of time, the sign drew at least a dozen people to the honey farm to shop locally.

"I feel it was adding something to the community," said Flys. "It brought people into the community to spend money, people who would have otherwise only stopped to get gas in King. But they stopped and bought and saw how beautiful King is."

Flys has since put up a new directional sign at the corner of Highway 27 and the 15th Sideroad consisting of four bee hives which spell out the word "Buzz" and a fifth hive which has an arrow pointing east on the 15th Sideroad to direct potential customers to the honey farm. Flys filed for a sign bylaw exemption last week. He was required to pay the \$500 fee despite his request that the Township waive the fee for farmers. Flys would still like to see changes made to the sign bylaw. In particular, he would like more lenience for signs for agricultural business owners and rural businesses. He has also contacted the King Chamber of Commerce seeking support. The chamber is expected to discuss and vote on the matter Monday.

Committee directed staff to proceed with investigating and developing an Agri-Business Wayfinding Signage Program as a component of a broader tourism signage program to be implemented and maintained by the Township on an ongoing basis. Staff will return to committee in the fall with a report outlining the proposed implementation strategy and estimated costs. It is anticipated that this will be a 2015 budget and work plan consideration that coincides with the three-year Community Tourism plan.