

Schaefer puts forward motion to protect bees

By Angela Gismondi

Councillor Debbie Schaefer wants the province to ban a substance that's harmful to bees.

She put forward a notice of motion regarding neonics and honey bees at a recent council meeting.

Health Canada's Pest Management Regulatory Agency (PMRA) determined that current agricultural practices related to the use of neonicotinoid treated corn and soybean seed are affecting the environment and having a negative impact on bees and other pollinators.

Schaefer's motion asked that Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne be requested to honour a commitment made to the Ontario Beekeepers Association (OBA) during the recent provincial election campaign. Wynne wrote to the OBA stating "the Ontario Liberals are committed to working with the agricultural and beekeeping sector to ensure full and equitable access to non-neonicotinoid treated seed for growers and establish a system that allows for targeted use of neonicotinoids only in production areas or production circumstances where these pesticides are actually shown to be required."

Wynne also stated the OBA proposal to hold a targeted forum to develop recommendations and identify a pollinator health road map is a priority action for the Liberal government and should be undertaken within the first six weeks of being elected.

As part of her motion, Schaefer also asked that King Township offer to provide a venue for the forum to be held, to develop recommendations and to identify a pollinator health road map as promised by the Liberal Party during the election campaign.

"I am committed to finding a balanced approach, based in science, that addresses the important role both pollinators and growers play in Ontario's agri-food industry," stated Jeff Leal, Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs in a release. "Over the coming months I want to first consult with industry, farms and environmental stakeholders on options that are practical, including the consideration of a license system. Our intention is to move away from widespread, indiscriminate use of neonicotinoid-based pesticides. I look forward to hearing the perspectives of experts and stakeholders."

Local honey farm owner Andre Flys was pleased with the Liberal government's initiative on the matter.

"The commitment from the Liberal government that they are going to restrict the use of neonicotinoids is what we (beekeepers) were looking for," explained Flys.

Schaefer pointed out the King Environmental Advisory Committee (KEAC) made a recommendation to the previous council that neonicotinoids not be used in the township.

"KEAC was very forward thinking," Schaefer explained. "We are simply renewing that commitment in this resolution."

Schaefer's resolution also requested that information on the use of neonicotinoid treated seed as well as best management practices be provided on King Township's Sustainable King website with a call to local farmers to seek out and utilize non-neonicotinoid treated seeds when they are preparing for their 2015 planting season and if use of neonicotinoid treated seeds is required to encourage best management practices are rigorously followed.

The resolution, seconded by Councillor Avia Eek, was supported by all members of council. It will be circulated to the Prime Minister, the Premier of Ontario, other municipalities, agencies, ministers and MPPs.