

Beaver trapping nixed in favour of dam removal, Council decides

Aurora will discontinue beaver trapping, a method to maintain the flows of local water courses and stormwater ponds, in favour of dam removal.

Council made the decision last week following a motion from Mayor Tom Mrakas and concerns from members of the public.

In his motion, Mayor Mrakas called on staff to discontinue trapping and instead follow dam removal as it is the only humane option available to the municipality at this time, while also exploring alternate ways to manage water levels.

For me, it comes down to one simple point: what we're doing right now is directing staff to discontinue any return to trapping and while we discontinued it, if it is necessary, that we implement dam removal and during that time we work with the Conservation Authority (Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority / LSRCA) on how we can explore alternative water level management controls to ensure it is in compliance with the ECA (Environmental Compliance Approval).

We need to make sure it is done properly, that there are safeguards in place that not only protect our infrastructure but do it in a way that we can ensure the safety of [the beavers]. I think ultimately we have had those conversations that no one wants to see beavers get trapped, but further to that, we need to have a conversation as well about expertise.

Not only did I speak with the Conservation Authority, I have also spoken to experts, whether [from] York University or some other professors as well. They stated too that when it comes to the Ministry of Natural Resources and their philosophy as far as beavers cannot be trapped and transported they say that it is not feasible, 'you can't do that, that it shouldn't be done.' A lot of people are saying that that philosophy is outdated and that [it] needs to be revisited and looked at. This is some of the work staff need to do through the Conservation Authority, working in partnership in how we can get to a place to ensure our infrastructure remains safe while we have a proper mitigation strategy.

It is, he said, a short-term strategy and a long-term plan will need to be hammered out by municipal staff, the LSRCA, and the Ministry of the Environment.

Councillor Wendy Gaertner agreed with the Mayor's position that this was not an issue that was unique to Aurora and said she too hoped revised guidance would impact all of York Region's Northern Six municipalities.

It is not just the pond at St. John's and Bayview; sadly, this is a general problem with our ponds, she said. We do have to realize the reason the Province is involved in this is because there are very strict technical parameters that are required in order to do what the ponds are supposed to do, which is protect people, property and infrastructure. They serve a very important function. It is not an easy fix [but] this is a start.

Councillor Rachel Gilliland also said this was a good start in being a little more proactive.

I am also happy to hear [that] this is a short-term strategy because we really don't know what the result of this will look like, she said. There are other municipalities in North America where they have taken different measures and the consequences might be different. I am really interested to see what the outcome is [and] I would really like it to be a positive one. Let's see what staff come back with and hopefully an alternative method will work just to move the needle forward.

In voicing his support for the motion, Councillor Harold Kim said it has been mentioned that what might work elsewhere might not work in Aurora and vice versa but all methods are worth exploring.

I am glad we have this motion here that we can more definitively confirm whether alternative methods will work and if staff can procure an expert so we would know definitely what our next step is, he said. Hopefully it will be about preservation of life and

we can do this expeditiously and there will be a long-term solution, but I will wait for the report to come back to see what our options are.?

The motion was approved unanimously.

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter