

?Clean Communities? bylaw intended to tackle waste, graffiti

Physical distancing measures have spurred more and more residents to lace up and get their exercise walking around their neighbourhoods.

During these walks, you've probably encountered graffiti of some kind on walls, benches and other pieces of infrastructure, but a new bylaw set to get the thumbs-up from Council will look at tackling graffiti, tagging and other forms of vandalism directly.

Council has given the tentative green light to a ?Clean Communities Bylaw?, a new standard set to replace the Town's existing Clean Yards and Debris Bylaws to address the current needs of an evolving community.

Set for formal approval at Council later this month, the bylaw accounts for future growth while implementing new standards on graffiti abatement to get Aurora in line with policies that are standard across York Region.

?As part of a comprehensive review of the Town's current bylaw legislation with the objective to modernize the Town's bylaws, staff have identified that existing legislation is outdated and does not address current community expectations,? said Alexander Wray, Aurora's Manager of Bylaw Services, in a report to Council, noting that what's on the books today was enacted in 2005. ?The existing bylaws are reflective of the Town's needs when it was approximately 35 per cent less populated; however, there are redundancies and deficiencies between the two bylaws.

?Modernization of the Town's existing bylaws allows the municipality to remain progressive and meet the changing expectations of the residents. It also allows the Town to prepare for future growth and intensification while ensuring that the Town maintains its small-town charm.?

A primary component of the new plan is bringing Aurora in line with neighbouring York Region municipalities on graffiti abatement. According to Mr. Wray, Aurora is the only municipality that does not have formal legislation to address community-driven graffiti concerns.

?Bylaw services receives minimal complaints related to graffiti and will contact property owners to request graffiti be removed,? he explained. ?However, if the property owner is not responsive and cooperative, Bylaw has no ability to take further action as currently there is no legislation in place.

?In addition to the implementation of graffiti standards, the proposed Clean Communities Bylaw enhances compliance timelines and introduces provisions for the maintenance of boulevards on all properties throughout the Town. Maintenance of boulevards is also considered best practice

and consistent with neighbouring municipalities. The service enhancements will require property owners to keep their properties and boulevards free of long grass, weeds and waste. Additionally, the proposed bylaw will introduce a minimum three-day compliance timeframe. This service enhancement will allow for faster compliance at problem properties and ensure the community standard is maintained in a more efficient manner.?

On their first sweep of the draft bylaw ahead of formal approval on May 26, local lawmakers said they welcomed the changes.

?I am really happy we're revising some of our bylaw here,? said Councillor Rachel Gilliland, adding she recently had a call from a resident on keeping Aurora clean. ?[Their concerns were] more aligned with commercial properties and what kind of rules were set in place for commercial.?

Councillor Gilliland received assurances from staff that the proposed bylaw applies to all properties in Town, including commercial buildings. While staff said the Bylaw department would respond to any complaints, open an investigation file and take appropriate action, ?proactive enforcement? is more challenging as it depends on staff resources and priorities.

?Being proactive is very difficult, I understand that, but having the ability to bring it to the attention of bylaw [and] register a complaint with an address, puts that property in a bit of a high alert,? said the Councillor.

Techa van Leewen, Aurora's Director of Bylaw Services said her department would ?always seek voluntary compliance through education? as a first approach and, if cooperation was not received, ?more progressive enforcement action? would be taken. In the case of a repeat offender, the education step would be bypassed for enforcement.

Also welcoming the proposed new legislation was Councillor Wendy Gaertner, who singled out the anti-graffiti measures.

Citing the pedestrian stairway off Yonge Street's historic business block down to parking off Temperance Street as ?graffiti alley?, she said the proposed measures would help combat tagging in this area.

?It is absolutely problematic because the walls of the buildings belong to somebody else but the pathway is ours,? she said, seeking assurances that if messages of hate were scrawled out on the walls the Town would now be able to take care of it.

?We would certainly, at that point, also engage York Regional Police,? said Ms. van Leeuwen.

Mayor Tom Mrakas also praised the anti-graffiti measures, citing the graffiti abatement work of his spouse, Alison Collins-Mrakas when

she served on the 2006 ? 2010 Council.

?I might be a bit biased, but an excellent Councillor back in the day created a task force to look after graffiti and they did a wonderful job as a task force and actually removed quite a bit of graffiti,? said Mayor Mrakas. ?I actually went out and helped remove with YRP and they had a youth come out and it was incredible how much graffiti is around Town when you actually go out and see it. I am glad this is being added to it. It is a long time coming and I am glad it is here.?

By Brock Weir