

Councillor urges re-think on Emerald Ash Borer treatment

By Brock Weir

Despite Council approving the chemical IMA-JET for treatment of ash trees across Aurora set to be decimated by the invasive Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) beetle, one Councillor is urging a re-think of this course of action, citing environmental concerns.

Councillor Wendy Gaertner raised the issue, stating her own research has led to environmental questions. Speaking to the matter ahead of a region-wide working group assembled to address the EAB across the area, Councillor Gaertner suggested it was time for Council to do some "research on the chemical behind it" before forging ahead with the IMA-JET treatment.

"It is a chemical that is going to be very dangerous to our bees and if we don't have bees, we don't have pollination and then we will really be in trouble," she said.

Last week, Councillor Michael Thompson said he and the rest of Council had been at the receiving end of "fairly technical information" from residents and requested Al Downey, Aurora's Director of Parks and Recreation to weigh in on it.

The issue of IMA-JET and its impact on the already dwindling bee population was considered by Council when they last approved the treatment at the end of May.

"Council has already made a decision to move forward with IMA-JET, so that is the chemical staff are proposing to use," said Mr. Downey at the time. "There are some discussions with regards to that chemical, I am aware of that, but we feel confident this chemical is not going to be airborne, which is the concern. It is contained within the trees.

"There is an opportunity for other municipalities, however, within the Region, to also look at alternative chemicals as well as alternative treatments and learn from each other with regards to the best methods in treating the Emerald Ash Borer."

Earlier this year, Council voted to ditch plans to treat the ash trees with the previously approved TreeAzin chemical in favour of IMA-JET on the recommendation it might ultimately prove both cheaper and more effective than the other. By that time, ash trees on public lands had already received a preliminary treatment with the TreeAzin, but the spread of EAB both on public and private land marched on. "Recent information obtained by staff from the manufacturer of TreeAzin suggests that consideration be given to treating ash trees in at least one consecutive year in areas where EAB infestation is moderate to heavy," said Mr. Downey at the time. "Unfortunately, this information was not available or provided by the manufacturer when the Town embarked on the treatment program. Staff do not believe this information was withheld or that the product was misrepresented as it was relatively new to the market and has shown good results in preliminary trials and testing in Oakville.

"Unlike TreeAzin, which is a biologic, low toxicity, non-chemical product, IMA-JET contains the chemical compound imidacloprid which is highly toxic to EAB larvae and is applied in the main tree trunk at grade level as the tree roots flare. The product is encapsulated within a sealed plug system such that no chemical contact can occur on the outside of the host tree. It is from the neonicotinoid family of pesticides and is currently the subject of controversy in the agricultural and apicultural industry as it has been linked to the decline of honey bee colonies in some parts of the province."