

## Further changes to tree bylaw will consider heritage districts

**By Brock Weir**

New revisions to Aurora's proposed new tree bylaw could come forward as early as November.

As expected last week, Council delayed further consideration on the new bylaw which would provide tougher rules and harsher penalties for people who remove trees from their properties without a permit. It would also narrow the number of trees people can cut on their properties ? be it residential or business ? without approval.

Should the new provisions be passed next month, residents and property owners will now only be allowed to remove two trees from their lands with trunks more than 20 centimetres and less than 70 centimetres without a permit in any one year window. That number currently stands at four trees.

Golf courses could also see significant changes in how they do business. They are currently exempt across the board from a tree bylaw, but Council's approval could limit them from removing 10 trees with the same size restrictions without a permit per year. Currently exempt conservation authorities and school boards would also be tied into the bylaw.

While preliminary discussions at the Committee Level focused primarily on golf courses and the rights of property owners ? as well as the argument from some Councillors that the number of trees allowed to be removed should be proportionate to the property in question ? that was not the case in the last go-round.

Comments will now be considered by staff when making their final revisions to it, but last week's focus came squarely in on heritage trees.

Within the proposed bylaw, owners of homes within heritage districts in Aurora would have to get a permit, as well as approvals from both Council and the Heritage Advisory Committee, for just one tree. There are no specific provisions for heritage property owners currently on the books.

?I would like to see us revisit the report with perhaps a revision to remove the provisions for the heritage district, so that people who live in the heritage district have the same rights as everyone else,? said Councillor Chris Ballard.

These concerns gained traction around the table with Councillors such as Michael Thompson indicating enforcing the bylaw could prove to be a challenge in these house-proud areas.

?You can see what we saw tonight that anyone who wants to cut a tree in the heritage district, they have got to then do a permit, they have to go to the Heritage Advisory Committee (HAC) and then they have to go to Council,? said Councillor Thompson, referring to a two hour debate focusing on three individual trees on one Aurora street. ?Then what happens if someone who lives in that district opposes it and then all of a sudden they're dealing with every single tree? I think that is an issue.?

After the previous tree debate, Councillors didn't get to tackle this until after 11 p.m. Councillor Thompson suggested that rather than take the issues one by one, putting forward individual amendments to get something that everyone can agree to, that it would be better to wait for staff to come back with their next report outlining previously expressed concerns.

?Staff have heard the ones that had some traction and I would like to see them come back and then move forward with them.?

Councillor John Gallo agreed that November would be a reasonable time to expect these revisions back.

?I would have preferred to have dealt with the previous motion and really tweaked it to deal with that heritage aspect,? he said.

Nevertheless, Councillors Ballard and Wendy Gaertner were not keen to delay a decision any further on the tree bylaw and get it on the books.

?I think staff have worked for many months and it has been staff throughout the corporation, so I am not really sure what staff is going to do with this,? said Councillor Wendy Gaertner. ?I think they have already tried to advise us on how to proceed.?

Aurora currently has one heritage district, located in the northeast corner of Yonge and Wellington and radiating out almost to Industrial Parkway. Studies are currently underway for a second heritage district on the opposite side of Wellington Street throughout much of Downtown Aurora.