

Golf courses should be exempt from Clean Communities Bylaw: Councillor

Golf courses rely on landscaping for game play and, when it comes to grass and turf maintenance, should be exempt from Aurora's Clean Communities Bylaw, according to Ward 4 Councillor Michael Thompson.

This week, Council will give final consideration to Councillor Thompson's motion, which was given tentative approval at the Committee level earlier this month.

In his motion, the Councillor says changes would be particularly applicable to golf courses built alongside residential properties.

"The Town of Aurora enacted the Clean Communities Bylaw to establish clear, consistent and enforceable standards for property maintenance throughout the municipality," said Councillor Thompson in his motion. "Standards for grass and yard maintenance are intended to reduce pests and vermin, ensure consistent community appearance, and prevent selective or inconsistent enforcement practices.

"The Town of Aurora contains several fully-operational golf courses, many of which abut and share divisional property lines with residential properties within Aurora and neighbouring municipalities. Golf courses are highly specialized land uses that require agronomic turf management practices distinct from residential or general commercial properties in order to maintain safe, functional, and environmentally managed playing services."

Golf courses, he added, are already subject to provincial regulations governing the use of pesticides, and Aurora applying "standard grass height and yard maintenance provisions of the Clean Communities Bylaw to golf courses may create operational conflicts and unintended enforcement challenges without advancing the original intent of the bylaw."

Should the motion get final approval this week, Town Staff will be directed to bring forward just such a bylaw amendment, applying only to "lands actively used or maintained as part of an operational golf course, and not to vacant, surplus, or non-golf-related lands."

"As you know, we have a number of golf courses, a lot of them have homes bordering on the golf courses. I would, in my experience, say that they operate on a good neighbor policy," said Councillor Thompson at the Committee of the Whole meeting. "They have good relationships with those that border. But at the same time, the way the bylaw is written is that technically they could be in violation of the bylaw for not keeping their grass to a certain standard. For those that are familiar with golf and play golf, we know that on the fringes, sometimes we'll call it the rough, and some golf courses as part of their experience on the whole, they will allow the grass to grow to more than 20 centimeters in the rough, and that could put them in violation.

"So, theoretically, somebody could lodge a complaint and that would force bylaw to go out and serve a notice of violation. But we recognize, and what we've tried to identify here working with staff is that it's really just those areas that are actually specific to the golf course itself, the areas of play, and that we recognize that these owners, and many of us know them individually as well? they are good stewards of their golf courses. They take pride in their course. They're out there maintaining them all the time. These are not unkept properties. They are manicured and managed in that sense. We don't want to see an issue whereby bylaw is forcing them a violation when really, I think it warrants them being able to manage that aspect of their business."

The good neighbour aspect of golf courses was recognized by Ward 1 Councillor Ron Weese, citing St. Andrew's Golf Course on St. John's Sideroad as a particular example, allowing the community to use their trails in the off-season.

Ward 3 Councillor Wendy Gaertner asked whether the motion had been spurred by complaints, but Councillor Thompson said it was inspired more by conversations with property owners.

"I do know that there were some conversations had with one property owner and a particular golf course, for sure, and that's partly

what spurred some of these conversations in the development of this bylaw,? he replied. ?Nothing actually happened with those concerns and conversations.?

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter