

Region investigating tree cuttings in south Aurora



By Brock Weir

Extensive tree cutting in the southern end of Aurora is under investigation by the Region of York.

The Region is in the middle of investigating a large swath of trees, cut down on the west side of Yonge Street near Vandorf Sideroad.

Ian Buchanan, Manager of Environmental Services and Forestry for the Region, said his department was alerted to the cutting by the Town of Aurora last month, and investigations are continuing.

'The matter is currently under investigation in terms of the Region's Forest Conservation bylaw,' Mr. Buchanan told The Auroran last week. 'I am not at liberty to disclose any of the details of where we're at there, but we are involved in a review of this matter since early June and the investigation is ongoing.'

While Mr. Buchanan would not disclose further details of the case, he said the inquiry involves a 1.5 hectare plot of land and, prior to the incident, was comprised primarily of trees.

The incident raised the ire of RAYS 'Ratepayers of Aurora Yonge South' who took their concerns to the Region.

The cutting on the land, they said was in violation of Aurora's fill and grading bylaw and they look on with concern as work has continued. They also raised concerns over the developers' access to Yonge Street.

'I am not sure how anyone can simply ignore the rules and get away with it, or simply create a process which at the end of the day is cheaper and faster from a developers' point of view than seeking the proper approvals,' wrote their co-chair. 'Even if after a lengthy court case there were fines imposed, they in their present form, do not pose a deterrent for the lucrative 'better to ask for forgiveness than permission plan' that is being acted upon by these individuals.'

Concern also stemmed from the fact the lands in question are on the Oak Ridges Moraine, an area of strict limits on what can be done on the land, and a strong, extensive, and passionate group of supporters behind it.

The incident was briefly discussed at the end of June. At the time, Al Downey, Aurora's Director of Parks and Recreation, said it was a Regional issue as it was within a Regional woodlot.

'We have been in communication with the Region, as has the Mayor, with regards to it, and they are being followed through with the Region. At this point it is not a municipal issue.'

Nevertheless, clearing, filling and grading has continued on the site, to the anger of neighbouring residents. After a flurry of emails over the weekend between residents, councillors, regional and municipal staff, Marco Ramunno, Aurora's Director of Planning, said work is continuing despite orders otherwise.

?The owner started moving some fill out and grading, so we took action and issued orders because he doesn't have permits for any top soil removal or grading to take place, nor has he ever submitted any planning applications for the property? Mr. Ramunno told The Auroran.

?Our guys have been out there just about every day so if he continues to do it, he is not respecting the orders. Our bylaw officers are aware of it and we have been getting emails from residents as well.?

According to Mr. Buchanan, the Region will first see whether there has indeed been a violation of the bylaw. If there has been, they will ?typically? prosecute and consider either reforestation and/or a penalty as possible remedies. These are the only tools, he added, available to them under the Ontario Municipal Act.

?It appears at this time that the tree clearing falls under the jurisdiction of the Region's conservation bylaw,? said Mr. Buchanan. ?There may be other jurisdictional issues or matters going on with the property. Right now, I think the Town is reviewing it under their zoning bylaw but the tree clearing is squarely York Region's issue under the Regional Forest Conservation Bylaw.?