

Stop-work order placed on south end property



By Brock Weir

Stop work orders were finally hammered into the ground Friday on a property in south Aurora subject to 'illegal' clearing and cutting.

Signs were posted and municipal vehicles were placed in front of the entrance of the property on Yonge Street near Vandorf Sideroad. As The Auroran reported on Wednesday, the subject had been in the centre of a storm after 1.5 hectares of trees were removed from the Oak Ridges Moraine property.

The tree clearing is subject to bylaws at the Region of York, while the subsequent dumping on the site is under the jurisdiction of the Town. Both offences are currently under investigation.

In a joint statement released Friday, both the Region of York and the Town of Aurora said they are 'reviewing legal options' over the 'illegal tree-cutting and illegal fill operation' at the south end of Town.

'After Regional and Town staff was alerted to illegal tree cutting that had already occurred, York Region Forestry staff confirmed the woodland is located on the Oak Ridges Moraine and falls under the jurisdiction of the Regional Forest Conservation Bylaw,' reads the joint statement.

'Additionally, illegal placement of fill and site alteration appears to be continuing in contravention of the Town of Aurora fill and zoning bylaws.'

'The owner of the property is 1605772 Ontario Limited; a corporate search has revealed the principal is Stana Strmota. Allcon Concrete and Haulage Ltd. Together with All Bins Inc, operated by Robert Strmota, appears to be conducting the work on the site. Stana Strmota, Robert Strmota, the property owner, and All Bins Inc. have been served notices of violation by the Town of Aurora. To date, the Notice of Violations continues to be ignored.'

According to the Region, staff had previously met with the property owners last year to provide information on their forestry bylaws and application process, but further requests for meeting with the owners were not acknowledged.

Regional Chairman Bill Fisch said the tree cuttings on the land were 'devastating'.

'The property owner has knowingly disregarded Regional and municipal bylaws and processes,' he said in a statement. 'The removal of mature trees has impacted the forest cover for the Town of Aurora and for the Region as a whole. It is devastating to our environment and, together with the Town of Aurora, we are sending a clear message that this activity will not be condoned.'

Alarm bells were raised also by Ratepayers of Aurora Yonge South (RAYS), a group which has been very vocal about developments

in the Town's southern quadrant, particularly when it concerns construction on the Oak Ridges Moraine.

Speaking about the site on Friday as the Stop Work orders were put in the ground, Mayor Geoffrey Dawe, said the whole situation had been handled "very badly" by the property owners. When asked whether an "act now, pay later" could be attributed to the problem, whereby some landowners may see it as more cost effective to violate the bylaws and simply pay the penalty later, he said it is "unfortunate but true."

"There is just no way to be proactive because you don't know who is going to go in and do that kind of thing," he said. "These people are not respecting the rule of law and have been told on a number of occasions to stop doing it and they haven't stopped."

Looking ahead, penalties in the offing could include substantial fines both from the Region and the Town, which could ultimately be up for the courts to decide. Councillors also voted Tuesday night to seek external legal counsel to file an injunction on the property.

"We could get an injunction" but I think, unfortunately, most of the damage has been done," added Mayor Dawe. "I am not sure what an injunction would get us to do."