

Committee of the Whole, Dec 2, 2019
RPF-18-19

From: James Fisher
Date: Monday, December 2, 2019 at 8:00 AM
To: "mayor@burlington.ca" <mayor@burlington.ca>
Cc: "rory.nisan@burlington.ca" <rory.nisan@burlington.ca>
Subject: Tree bylaw

Dear Mayor Marianne Meed Ward,

Thankyou for the December newsletter. I have found your newsletters to be very informative and useful.

I have copied the blurb from newsletter on tree bylaw here for reference;

After nine years, in my time, of debating the issue of a private tree bylaw, it looks like we will be landing one soon. Stay tuned and be sure to have your say at the Committee of the Whole meeting on Dec. 2 where this item will be presented. I will be looking to bring a motion at that meeting to create a tree canopy task force to bring all of our community partners together to make this happen. The aim is for Burlington to get a tree canopy coverage of between 30-50 per cent.

My comments are with respect to the rural area only.

After nine years of tree bylaw discussion I would think it is time to discard this bylaw approach for all the reasons previously explained. The Region's tree bylaw and other current legislation/regulation is more than enough for rural area.

Your article then mentions the creation of a task force on tree canopy and a target of 30 to 50%.

While I can support this concept if it is balanced with agriculture and landowner needs, it is likely going to fail as landowners cannot be expected to participate after the tree bylaw is implemented. (Note 50% is likely out of the question unless agriculture is severely impacted)

As was pointed out at the start of this bylaw process if the City is really about effectively enhancing tree area in the rural area then the wrong studies have been done. The very first study should engage the landowners (who are essential to any project unless City is expropriating land) to come up with programs that would motivate them to plant more trees. The regulatory focus has instead served to alienate and marginalise landowners. As a Conservationist I despair at how we seem so set on ensuring good stewardship is punished instead of rewarded.

Climate Change

It is my opinion that solutions to climate change are much more difficult than the staff report indicates. While replacing urban uses with trees is likely to sequester carbon (at least in the long run) replacing agriculture with trees is not a guarantee to capture more carbon than current agricultural use. Further replacing agriculture with woodlands will not enhance a local sustainable food supply.

We are all responsible for climate change and the cost of mitigating or correcting it. Placing a regulatory and financial burden on good stewardship will hit the rural area disproportionately given the greater tree cover and larger land parcels. Historically the rural area has been increasing tree cover since at least 1900 despite the fact that tree cutting takes place as a normal part of agriculture. A managed forest is generally healthier and has increased growth compared to an unmanaged forest.

I fail to see how the staff recommendations is anything but counterproductive for CO2 emissions in the rural area.

A tree related program that would likely reduce CO2 emissions is dealing with wood waste. A combined heat and power project that used downed trees and branches for fuel and also produced biochar that could sequester carbon in the soil might prove very beneficial in a climate change action plan.

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Red tape Reduction

I may be missing something but (staff report) suggesting there is a red tape reduction when Burlington is implementing a new bylaw that requires permits and fees where there are none now as well as hiring extra staff to enforce the bylaw cannot be anything but a red tape increase. The real question should be: is the additional red tape cost effective in achieving a defined goal? In my opinion the answer is no for the rural area.

I would respectfully recommend that the City not include the rural area in a private tree bylaw. In my view it will be counterproductive to Conservation and Climate Change goals.

Sincerely

James Fisher

Fidale Farms Ltd