

Debate continues over changes to tree protection by-law

Isaac Olson, November 13, 2012

The Free Press

Several members of Côte St. Luc's council want to prune back the city's strict tree by-law to make it easier for property owners to remove trees from their land. But not every councillor is on board with those changes they say will uproot legislation that protects the environment. Councillors Steven Erdelyi, Glenn Nashen and Dida Berku all take issue with the proposed change that will allow residents to replace a 100-year-old tree with a single, small one. "If you just replace trees one for one, it is going to take 50 years for that tree to regain its fullness as a habitat and air purifier," Berku said. "I find it very appalling that they would remove the replacement schedule." "The purpose of the tree protection bylaw is to stop trees from being cut down without a serious reason," stated Erdelyi, who encouraged residents to attend the November 12 council meeting and voice their opinion. "My concern is that any resident will be able to say that a tree is blocking their view and will be able to cut down their tree. One of the things that Côte St. Luc is proud of is our tree cover, which adds to the beauty of the city and helps to prevent the heat-island effect, which can be very dangerous." Councillors Ruth Kovac and Sam Goldbloom are opposed to the restrictions of the five-year-old tree by-law because, "I found it to be too onerous on the residents," said Kovac. The by-law sends each qualifying tree-felling application to the city council for debate, and each cut tree must be replaced by as many as six trees based on the felled trunk's circumference — meaning the older the tree, the more saplings an owner must buy for planting on both public and private land. "It's really too much to ask," said Kovac, "It really can be quite expensive for the resident." Proponents of the revision are also pushing to allow residents a felling permit if the tree blocks their view. Councillor Allan Levine agrees with this measure and Councillor Mitchell Brownstein said he was in favour of a tree protection by-law as long as people have basic rights over their property. Trees in the backyard and side of the house should be treated differently than those in front, he said, because "if a tree is not of significant benefit to the city, it should be okay for a resident to cut it down." Nashen said he favours uniform protection where trees may not be cut unless a horticulturist declares there is disease, danger of falling or other mitigating factors that convince the expert that a tree ought to be felled. Councillor Mike Cohen said he still has not decided which way he will vote. If he votes against the by-law, it may lead to a 4-4 split and Mayor Anthony Housefather will have to break the tie. When asked, the mayor declined to comment until a pre-vote consultation meeting is held and the revisions are made public.