

NEWS & ANALYSIS

Lively tree policy debate in CSL

By Joel Goldenberg
The Suburban

A lingering debate over Côte St. Luc's policy of giving permission to cut down trees and requiring their replacement reached a new peak at last week's city council meeting, resulting in 23 minutes of discussion.

For the last several years, there have been many split votes on this issue. Mayor Anthony Housefather succinctly summed up the overall debate.

"It's appropriate that Councillor [Mitchell] Brownstein and I sit in the middle," he quipped, "given the fact we seem to be constantly in the middle between three people who always want to cut down every tree that comes before us and three people who never want to cut anything down."

"Both sides have good points."

The request before the council last week was to fell two trees on a Smart Avenue property, which would then be replaced by four - with at least two to be planted on the property itself.

Councillor Dida Berku opposed the Smart Avenue request, charging that its approval violates the city's tree protection bylaw by treating similar requests differently.

"Some trees get cut, some get saved -

it's just hit or miss," Berku said, adding that the city horticulturist and urban planning department recommended that council refuse the request as the trees are healthy. She added that a similar request on Wolseley for tree cutting was not granted, a decision that was recommended by the horticulturalist and urban planning department.

Brownstein said that Berku herself has also gone against recommendations of the urban planning department.

"This argument does not stand at all," he said. "We're following the procedure; [council] makes the decision." Brownstein also said the trees are so big that they almost hide the Smart Ave. property.

Councillor Steven Erdelyi agreed with Berku, and countered that Brownstein's perception is influenced by the position of the photograph of the property shown at the council meeting.

Councillor Glenn Nashen said he shared Berku's frustration.

"We are consistently inconsistent in the application of the tree protection bylaw," he added. "I would favour seeing an amendment to this bylaw."

But Nashen also pointed out that his resolution improved on the original request by doubling the amount of trees to be replaced. "By voting against this,

you're not accomplishing your ultimate goal, which is to have more trees," Nashen told Berku.

Councillor Ruth Kovac said she is in favour of replacing one tree with one tree.

"If we had it your way, we would probably be banning the sale of Christmas trees," Kovac told Berku. "We shouldn't be penalizing our residents."

Councillor Sam Goldbloom agreed, as he always has, with Kovac on this issue. "When someone has a property, they're entitled to the enjoyment of that property," Goldbloom said.

Housefather disagreed that council would be violating the tree protection bylaw by granting the tree cutting request.

"The only way we're going to resolve this issue is by completely amending the bylaw in a way that goes in one direction or another, and neither side will be happy if we do it that way," the mayor said.

Council ended up voting 4-3 against the tree cutting request, with councillors on opposite sides of the general issue voting against the request for different reasons. But Kovac said she will introduce a motion in the future to amend the tree bylaw.

"The resident is not served in the best interest here [tonight]," Kovac said.


BUDGET

Cont'd from page 7

MoWest budget is not feasible, I completely disagree. I think it simply comes down to making hard choices and prioritizing our needs. I personally am prepared to forego or reduce the extent of some non-essential services for 2012. We live in trying times and I'd sooner spend money to replace my home's leaking roof or repair my home's cracked foundation before I'd invest in new landscaping or garden furniture. We all make these choices every day. It is called living within your means and being responsible."


The report adds that some town residents are experiencing financial difficulty and are even debating whether to sell their homes, as they are "afraid they may not be able to sustain their combined home and living expenses in the long run. I am extremely sympathetic to this situation and constantly remind myself of this fact when I advocate in caucus."

"Your voice in this process is crucial. Let it be heard. Are you prepared for a seventh consecutive tax increase since we demerged - or will you encourage all of us on this council to dig a bit deeper and find a way to make do with less? It's your call. I will continue making my case within caucus. Help me make my job a little easier."

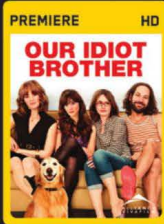


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