

Tree replacement on CSL's Edgemore Avenue divides councillors

by Martin C. Barry

The Monitor

Article online since September 16, 2009, 14:14

A disagreement among Côte St. Luc's elected officials two years ago over a controversial tree replacement bylaw came back to haunt them last Monday when three councillors refused to support a motion calling for a large tree in the front yard of an Edgemore Avenue private residence to be replaced by four smaller ones.

Citing disagreement with the bylaw, which allows council to demand up to four trees be planted to replace each tree a homeowner cuts down, councillors Ruth Kovac, Mike Cohen and Sam Goldbloom voted against the resolution, which passed nonetheless with the support of the five other councillors.

In 2007, following months of backroom negotiations and sometimes intense public debate, council adopted a comprehensive bylaw for the protection of Côte St. Luc's trees, despite the dissenting votes of councillors Goldbloom and Kovac. The provisions apply to any tree located on private land and any tree owned by the city.

No tree may be felled or cut in any way without a certificate of authorization. The bylaw sets out the number of trees that must be planted to replace ones that have been felled. For trees measuring 10 to 15 centimetres in diameter, the number of replacements is a minimum of one and a maximum of two. For 13 to 20.5 centimetres, as many as four must be planted.

Kovac said she was voting against it "especially since this is not a municipal tree but a privately-owned tree. It should be one for one, not necessarily four for one. I find that it's onerous. I will vote against it on principle that it should be one for one."

Berku, who had shepherded the tree bylaw through two years ago, despite opposition especially from Kovac, noted that the tree in question, a Colorado Blue Spruce, is three times the size of the house and very common in the surrounding neighbourhood.

"It's only because the resident is absolutely adamant about it that we're even agreeing to it," she said. "I think four trees is more than fair and we need to replace our trees in our city. We cannot allow trees of this height and this value to be cut down without replacing them."

"I believe that a private tree is in the public interest," said Councillor Mitchell Brownstein, who supported the four-for-one position. "I think that an agreement with the city and a resident to replace four trees represents a very good deal for the city. It will last for the next 20, 50, 100 years or whatever. And I think that in the long run it will serve the resident and the city well."

During the same meeting, Councillor Steven Erdelyi refused to support the purchase of a new Dodge Caravan vehicle for the public security department, on the basis that it wasn't energy-efficient. "The city should be looking to more energy-efficient vehicles," he said, maintaining that a gas/electric hybrid vehicle would have been more suitable.

Councillor Glenn Nashen, who deals with the public safety dossier, said he didn't disagree with Erdelyi on the principle of energy efficiency and that council would probably be heading more in the direction of hybrid vehicles in the near future.

"But our resources in public works, beginning with the mechanics, are not trained to deal with the kind of vehicle that Councillor Erdelyi is explaining," Nashen added. "Whereas they do have experience with Dodge Caravans and other mainstream vehicles."