

One-for-one is new rule

City passes tree cutting by-law changes

BY ISAAC OLSON

In what proponents say will not diminish Côte St. Luc's tree population, the council voted on December 10 to go ahead with amendments to a by-law that will ease some of the costs associated with tree-felling applications.

"After many months of discussion with the councillors, I feel this is far fairer to the residents when they are asking to replace a tree," said Councillor Ruth Kovak.

The five-year-old tree by-law sent each qualifying tree-felling application to the city council for debate, and each cut tree had to be replaced by as many as six trees based on the felled trunk's circumference; the older the tree, the more saplings an owner had to plant on both public and private land. Revisions to the five-year-old by-law would mean the Urban Planning director, rather than the council, would



Councillor Dida Berku expresses her concerns with changes to the city's tree by-law.

Photo: Isaac Olson

decide on applications, and residents could replace a 100-year-old tree with a single, small one.

"We will not have a net loss of trees as each tree will always be replaced with

another tree and the city does plant many more. I think this is something that is going to make the process much easier for someone that feels their tree is either in their way, not giving them enough light, has overgrown or is sick."

The new process, she continued, will be less costly for residents. The city, she noted, only receives an average of 30 tree-felling applications a year.

Councillors Steven Erdelyi, Dida Berku and Glenn Nashen voiced concerns over the changes, and said the amendments will make it too easy for residents to cut trees, does not replace the larger trees with an adequate number of saplings, fails to take into consideration the concerns of neighbours and could lead to an increase of heat islands found throughout a city in need of more canopy coverage.

Berku, speaking as the councillor who drafted the by-law originally based on other municipality's similar rules, said

the by-law allows more trees to be cut and fewer to be planted.

"I feel that, with climate change and the recognition that we need to protect as many trees as possible, that we need to counter greenhouse gases," said Berku. "We need to, especially, counter the heat-island effect in our own community, which is surrounded by railway yards."

Berku said the city is losing trees and not replacing them fast enough and Erdelyi noted that CSL actually has, percentage wise, fewer trees than Montreal. It is not effective, Berku said, to replace a 50-year-old tree with a sapling. Replacing older trees with more saplings based on a predetermined chart is more effective, "So I don't agree with removing the tree-replacement chart. I don't agree with going with a one-for-one option. I don't agree with removing the power of the council to apply that replacement chart," she said.

More updates on complaints needed: resident

BOROUGH ROUND-UP

At the start of the December 10 Côte St. Luc city council meeting, Leslie Satenstein asked officials for a better means of getting updates on street light repairs when a citizen calls in to report a malfunction.

As it is, the city encourages residents to call in and report street lamps that are misbehaving, but says Satenstein, when the same light is out for months, he'd like to know why.

"I am well aware that you don't send a person out for one lamp," said Satenstein. "You batch them so there is some economy in taking out the cherry picker, but it is now going on three months for the lamp I have requested a repair on twice. It's on 24/7."

Mayor Anthony Housefather agreed the delay can be linked to the strategy of repairing streetlights in batches, but it can also be related to Hydro Quebec, which at times, needs to make the fix.

When it comes to keeping vigilant citizens up to date on repairs, Housefather said, "We would love to install a software system at some point that allows you to do exactly what you stated. We are wed-

ded to a software system that the city of Côte St. Luc installed many, many years ago."

He said the current software does not provide the needed module to track and update information as suggested, meaning a costly overhaul of the current systems would be needed. As it is, he said the city is continuing to look for a cost-effective solution for keeping citizens informed.

Feral feeder creates 'cat-astrophe'

Cat-loving councillor Mike Cohen, while reminding citizens that licences are needed and now available for outdoor cats, said a recent incident has caused a headache for the cat committee.

Cohen said a resident on Eldridge Ave. was feeding feral cats in her backyard for a number of years, drawing about a dozen felines to her property every evening around dinnertime.

The resident, said Cohen, would not let the cat committee intervene in any way until finally, she ended up in assisted living — leaving the cats and some kittens to fend for themselves.

"Every day we've had different members go into the backyard, no matter how cold it is or how rainy it is, to feed those cats," said Cohen. "Otherwise, they'd



Councillor Mike Cohen talks cats during the council meeting.

Photo: Isaac Olson

starve to death."

It's important, he said, that people tag their outdoor cats or they face losing their feline friend, as outlined by the new by-law.

In a later interview, Shelley Schecter of the cat committee said, so far, the council has sterilized, vaccinated and dewormed nine out of the 12 cats.

The committee is working on the last three, she said, but the cats that aren't adopted will be released back onto the woman's property.

In the spring, when the weather is better, "we will have to re-trap these cats and slowly adapt them to a new location where they will be fed by another feeder."

Levine's joke extinguished

As the city adopted by-law 2396, which updates the fire safety by-law to meet island-wide standards, councillor Alan Levine, singing the lyrics, suggested musician Billy Joel play "We didn't start the fire."

As there was hardly a murmur of laughter in the near-empty council chamber, Housefather said: "Okay, you've had better jokes previously, Councillor Levine, we'll look for a better one next time. Think about one and we'll get back to you in a few minutes to see what you've come up with."

The mayor, however, failed to check back in with the councillor to see if he had a new joke.

—Isaac Olson