



Summary of comments received regarding the Woodlands Conservation Bylaw update

Oxford County initiated a review of the County's Woodlands Conservation bylaw (WCB) in the fall of 2016. In accordance with Council direction, staff prepared a draft WCB for the purpose of facilitating discussion and initiated a public and stakeholder consultation process that, to date, has included public information meetings, presentations to Area Municipal Councils, input from the County's Agricultural Advisory Committee, one-on-one discussions and/or presentations to interested parties, such as the Oxford Cattlemen's Association and Reforest Oxford and obtaining feedback through the County's web-based platforms, such as Speak Up! Oxford.

The input received to date has provided valuable insight into the County's Woodlands Conservation Bylaw program and will serve to guide changes to both the bylaw and matters related to its administration, enforcement and customer service.

While there have been many issues raised through the consultation process, a number of matters have been repeatedly identified as requiring further consideration before any new WCB is approved by the County. These matters include:

- A simpler bylaw that clearly sets out what is regulated and what is not regulated, together with more (or better) information and education regarding woodlands and the WCB;
- Improvements to the bylaw that include more 'as of right' tree cutting activities and less requirement for permits (i.e. trimming fields, clearing old fence rows, clearing trees interfering with drainage works) and where permits are required, reduced processing times;
- Consideration of tree species that are covered by the WCB, such as sumac, buckthorn and ash and whether it would be desirable to include provisions for cutting 'new' growth that has encroached into active agricultural fields in recent years;
- The need to maintain appropriate tools within the WCB that provides options for tree harvesting and management, including both circumference harvest provisions as well as good forestry practices;

- Improved customer service related to the administration and enforcement of the WCB, including information and education activities, more engaged and cooperative approaches to dealing with woodland-related matters and dispute resolution.

While the above-noted items reflect some of the key areas that have been raised through the process to date, all of the comments received through public consultation activities to this point are included on the County's website for information.

Going forward, County staff are reviewing all of the input that has been received from various sources and developing an 'issues and options' approach to addressing concerns and suggestions for consideration by the County's Agricultural Advisory Committee and County Council before initiating additional public consultation to further discuss the WCB. It is anticipated that the overall process will continue into summer and fall of 2017.