

# Woodlands Conservation By-Law

# Agenda

- Welcome and Introductions
- Purpose of the Public Meeting
- History and Background
- Public and Stakeholder Consultation
- Why Have a Woodlands Conservation By-law
- History & Background
- By-law Overview
- Draft By-law for Discussion Purposes - Overview
- Next Steps
- Question and Answer Period
- Closing Remarks

# Purpose of Public Meeting

- To present a draft Woodlands Conservation By-Law for the purpose of facilitating discussion
- To outline key changes between the current by-law and the draft version provided for discussion
- To provide an opportunity to ask questions and provide comments on all aspects of the of woodlands conservation in Oxford, including administration, enforcement and customer service activities

# Provide Input to the By-Law Review



Oxford County's Online Town Hall

**<http://www.oxfordcounty.ca/Your-Government/Speak-up-oxford>**

# Woodlands Conservation By-Law Review

## Public and Stakeholder Consultation

- Broad consultation process has been initiated by County Council
- Will include direct contact with various stakeholder groups as well as use of various social media feeds
- 3 initial Public Information Centres (Innerkip, Embro and Springford) to discuss the WCB issues

# Woodlands Conservation By-Law Review

## Public and Stakeholder Consultation

- This is the beginning of the process!
- The Draft By-law for Discussion was prepared from the current By-law and is intended to be a starting point for discussions going forward
- Feedback gathered from all sources will be documented and presented to Council for consideration and direction – the By-law as drafted today may look very different
- Consultation is intended to address all aspects of the WCB, including administrative, enforcement and customer service
- Further opportunities for input into the By-law through additional Public Meetings and consultation opportunities

# Woodlands Conservation By-Law Review

Public Meeting in Innerkip on November 22

- Well attended with a lot of good discussion about issues , including:
  - more tree harvesting activities that do not require permits (i.e. trimming back fields, private drains)
  - more flexibility in dealing with fence rows and other similar ‘minor’ harvesting issues
  - reconsideration of some tree species covered by the by-law
  - by-law administration, enforcement and overall customer service related to the by-law
  - why have a WCB at all / what does the County do to promote good forestry except enforce a by-law

# Woodlands Conservation By-Law Review

## Why have a By-law

- County is committed to a comprehensive approach to preserving and enhancing/increasing forest cover through the Official Plan
- County Official Plan recognizes the WCB as an important tool for retaining and enhancing woodlands in both settlements and rural areas
  - promote sustainable forestry practices
  - protect and enhance the value of woodlands for economic, environmental and social value
  - promotes natural heritage resources



# Woodlands Conservation By-Law Review

## Why have a By-law

- 30+ municipalities in Ontario have By-laws, including all of Oxford's immediate neighbours
- the Ontario Professional Foresters Association (OFPA) recognizes that Municipal By-laws support the Associations mandate of using professionals to manage woodlands.

# Oxford Natural Heritage Context

- Like most of SWO, two centuries of agriculture and development have transformed Oxford's natural environment
  - Woodland cover reduced from 75% to 13.2%
  - 75% of original wetlands have been drained
  - Now patchwork of smaller, more isolated natural areas
- Approx. 16.7% of County now covered by natural features
  - 13.2% woodland
  - 6.7% wetland (often overlap with other features)
  - 3.5% other features (i.e. water bodies)
- Still many good quality habitats with large wetlands and several trout streams, but also low forest cover & many poorer quality sites
- Important to maintain, restore or, where possible, improve what is left



# Natural Heritage Initiatives in Oxford

- **Managing public land** (15,900 trees planted on County lands – 2016)
- **Monitoring** (ONHSS, CA report cards)
- **Policies & By-laws** (OP, ZBs, WCB)
- **Education/ communication** (e.g. website, factsheets, direct contact)
- **Natural heritage tourism** (e.g. hiking, fishing, paddling)
- **Recognition - Stewardship Award**
- **Incentive Programs** (CWP - wetland & woodland enhancement)
  - > 70 ac of new/restored wetland
  - > 500 ac of trees/shrubs planted
  - Numerous other projects
- **Sustainability Plan & Reforest Oxford**
  - Goal to plant 10,000 trees/yr.
  - Working with landowners & other partners



# Woodlands Conservation By-Law Review

## History & Background

- Original Woodlands By-law in Oxford enacted in 1946
  - amendments over the years reflecting changes to legislation and regulation governing tree conservation
  - County receives a significant number of enquiries relating to tree issues each year
- By-law is currently administered/supported through the Public Works Department via a By-law Officer appointed by Council

# Woodlands Conservation By-Law Review

## Overview of By-law

- The authority to enact a By-law to regulate the harvest of trees is found in the Municipal Act
- The current County By-law, generally:
  - identifies woodlands
  - sets out the requirements for obtaining permits to harvest trees
  - provides definitions
  - outlines opportunities and processes for obtaining exemptions from the By-law
  - outlines provisions regarding enforcement and penalties

# Woodlands Conservation By-Law Review

## Oxford Natural Heritage Systems Study Update

- Provides a 'landscape level' assessment of natural heritage features and functions on a County-wide scale
- Recently completed study builds on previous work and identifies significant, locally important and non-significant natural features, including woodlands
- ONHSS primarily developed to provide technical and scientific basis for informing the development of Official Plan policies, but may be used to inform the WCB

# Woodlands Conservation By-Law Review

## Draft By-law for Discussion Purposes Overview

- Amend definitions section
  - update and modernize the current definitions including the definition of 'Good Forestry Practices' and 'Woodlands'
- With respect to Woodlands, clarifies how woodlands less than 1 ha can be protected through Local By-laws
  - updated definition also includes additional provisions related to measuring woodlands, the boundaries of woodlands and how a woodland is to be considered when dissected by roads, paths or watercourses

# Woodlands Conservation By-Law Review

## Draft By-law for Discussion Purposes (cont'd)

- Remove the 'Circumference Harvest' provisions/option and rely solely on the issuance of 'Good Forestry Practices' permits
  - CH is practice of cutting trees over a certain diameter
  - no account for species, age, quality, etc.
  - not considered to be a sustainable practice
- New By-law introduces 'Minor Exemptions'
  - permits the staff to issue permits for minor exemptions to the By-law without the need for Committee approval
  - would apply in limited circumstances



# Woodlands Conservation By-Law Review

## Draft By-law for Discussion Purposes (cont'd)

- 'Minor Exemptions' examples
  - where perimeter trees along productive agricultural fields are interfering with operations, drains
  - installation, maintenance, repair of open or closed private drains
  - trees to be harvested are not part of an identified natural heritage feature or system
  - pruning or trimming trees along woodland edges and fence rows to accommodate passage of agricultural equipment

# Woodlands Conservation By-Law Review

## Draft By-law for Discussion Purposes (cont'd)

- Committee Exemption provisions revised to include more guidance regarding the granting of exemptions
  - new By-law includes more guidance regarding the intent and purpose of the By-law
  - possible introduction of a companion policy document to guide compensation where an exemption is granted

# Woodland Conservation By-Law – Q & A

## Next Steps

- Undertaking the Public and Stakeholder consultation
- All input will be documented and considered in the process going forward
- Process to develop the new WCB will include a thorough vetting of the administration, enforcement and customer service aspects of the By-law with a view to improving all processes and procedures and generally improving customer service

# Question and Answer



# Woodlands Conservation By-Law Review

Thank you very much for your participation and interest in this project.