

# Residents fight to preserve side roads

by Paul Dalby  
THE INDEPENDENT

**A** LONG, LEAFY LANE winding through the rolling hills of Trent Hills is shaping up as a new battleground over how our countryside roads will look in the future.

Lined up on one side is a group of angry residents – including storekeepers, a famous wildlife artist, a geography teacher and a horticulturalist – attempting to block a long-standing policy of chopping down trees, shrubs and vegetation from the sides of the road.

Leading the argument for the brushing of roads is Trent Hills Mayor Hector Macmillan, who says “there should be no vegetation on road allowances at all.” The road allowance in Trent Hills is 66 feet across the full width of the road and drainage ditches.

The local residents mo-

bilized their forces on the weekend, quickly circulating a petition entitled “Save Our Side roads” in local stores and also launching an online petition <http://petitiononline.com/con2w428/petition.html>, which has already gathered 82 signatures (at press time).

The storm blew up on two fronts last week when a Trent Hills crew arrived to brush-cut foliage at the side of Concession 2 West, about seven kilometres west of Warkworth. Working alongside them was a team of men with chainsaws chopping down larger trees, including a large oak tree standing inside a private property fence line.

“It only takes 10 minutes to cut down a 100-year-old oak tree,” said noted wildlife artist Brent Townsend, who has owned property down the road since 1989. “By the time

people come home from shopping or work, it’s too late, they are cutting trees on your private property.”

“If you take out trees it’s going to look like Sudbury around here,” said Mr. Townsend.

Other residents along the normally tranquil side road were equally disturbed to find an entire section of trees and brush had been leveled to the ground.

“Thank God we live on this road and stopped them when we did,” said resident Jill Pillsworth, a horticulturalist. “We are not tree-huggers but council gave permission to do this without any consultation.”

The seeds of the confrontation were sown a few weeks ago at a meeting of Trent Hills council, which accepted an offer from local woodsman Doug Kelly to cut down trees along the municipality’s property line “free of charge.”

“The council considered that this is something we would have to do anyway and here’s a person offering to do it for free. He has an agreement with the municipality on which trees he can cut down.”

That agreement also extends to a 1.5 km. stretch of Porter Road, which runs from County Road 29 right into Concession 2 West. The property on the east side of Porter has recently been purchased by a new owner who wishes to take out some trees on the property line to “allow more sunshine into the fields”.

Under the agreement with Trent Hills, Mr. Kelly will not only remove trees on the private property but also any trees with a trunk diameter of less than 12-inches from the municipality’s side of fence line.

This would effectively clear all trees and vegetation along the side of the road, long considered one



**Ron and Pam Chasmer walk their dog along Porter Road. They are perplexed at the Trent Hills tree cutting plan.**

of the most beautiful walks in east Northumberland County.

Ron and Pam Chasmer walk their dog along Porter Road several times a week. They are perplexed at the plan to clear cut one side of the road.

“I write geography textbooks for Ontario high schools and my latest textbook includes a chapter on global warming and the importance of preserving our trees,” Mr. Chasmer said. “I urge kids to think globally, act locally. We say we need to protect our rainforest and we are cutting down our oak trees – give me a break.”

But Mr. Macmillan is unmoved by the arguments. “Trees are great natural resources and they look beautiful but they don’t belong in the road.

There should be no vegetation on road allowances at all.”

Asked what his ideal road allowance would look like, the mayor replied: “No trees, just grass. Look at the 401 and other municipalities, they never allow trees on road allowances.”



**“Scrape out the vegetation and throw down gravel which washes out,” says wildlife artist Brent Townsend on the plan.**



**Larger trees aren’t exempt from the Trent Hills plan to clear a full 66 feet across road allowances.**

Mr. Macmillan said that brush cutting is the accepted way of maintaining proper drainage ditches at the edge of the road and preventing tree branches from becoming a hazard for snowplow crews in the winter.

Mr. Townsend sees it somewhat differently: “They do the job half-assed, scrape out the vegetation and throw down gravel which washes out.

“Then they wonder why the road washes out. They remove everything that would hold back water and silt,” he said.

For now the contentious road clearing has stopped, although the fence demarking the property line at the side of the road has been pulled down. A delegation from the Save Your Side roads group will get a chance to present its case before Trent Hills Council next Monday, May 7.

Deputy Mayor Dean Peters, from the Percy ward, says the whole confrontation over tree and brush-cutting is really “a communications issue.

“They have expressed significant concerns,” he said. “I want to try very hard to get these people to find a forum for the rest of council to hear their points.”

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