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Tree bylaw approved after lengthy process

By **MELANIE HENNESSEY**

The Champion

The Region's updated tree bylaw was given a stamp of approval by Halton council Wednesday, bringing to a close years of hard work, revisions and public consultation.

The bylaw, which will apply to all woodlands that are .5 hectares or larger and greenlands outside those areas, is designed to protect local trees and prevent clear cutting or object destruction of these resources.

Before council unanimously approved the bylaw, it first heard from two residents who wanted to share their final thoughts on the issue.

Former Milton councillor Lieven Gevaert said he's pleased that farmers and other woodlot owners were listened to during the public consultation process on the

bylaw.

But, he said he's still concerned that preventing clear cutting, which he deemed to be the "essence" of the bylaw, is not explicitly addressed in the document.

"It would have been straightforward were the clear cutting objective stated as the real issue to protect woodlots from," he said.

Kilbride resident Jamie Fisher also addressed council. While he said he wanted council to support the bylaw, he pointed out that rural residents are compromising some of their rights as landowners to make the new bylaw work.

He explained to The Champion that under the Region's current tree bylaw there are no limits to how many trees a person could cut down for their own use. When the new bylaw comes into effect January 1, that amount will be limited to 24 cubic

metres per year.

Councillors went on to voice their thoughts on the bylaw, including those by Halton Hills and Regional Councillor Jane Fogal. "I look forward to this going into effect," she said. "This has been a contentious issue. I really thought we were never going to get to this point."

She also thanked the farming community for "sticking with it."

Oakville and Regional Councillor Janice Wright extended her congratulations to staff for the bylaw.

"They've done an amazing job," she said.

The Region's current tree bylaw came into effect in 1983. The updated bylaw implements more substantial fines for those who violate it. For an individual's first conviction, the fine goes from a maximum of \$5,000 to \$10,000 or \$1,000 per

tree, whichever is greater.

Subsequent convictions would be a maximum of \$25,000 and \$2,500 per tree.

Corporations can be charged up to \$50,000 or \$5,000 per tree on a first conviction under the new bylaw and \$100,000 or \$10,000 per tree for any convictions following.

The bylaw also includes a new provision for stop work orders when the bylaw is being violated. An enforcement officer can go on-site and issue an order to discontinue activity, whereas under the current bylaw the Region has to get a court injunction for that to happen.

Removing dead trees, branches and damaged trees for safety reasons and normal farming practices aren't restricted in the new bylaw.

A permit will be required or a forest management plan will have to be filed to harvest trees outside the urban area.

A permit and management plan will be necessary to cut trees in an urban area. A special council permit, issued at the discretion of council, will be needed for clear cutting.

Landowners who want to remove 24 cubic metres of trees annually for their own use in woodlands outside the urban area must use good forestry practices and not reduce tree density in the woodlands to below standard.

In addition to approving the new bylaw Wednesday, the resolution council supported also directs:

- That the appropriate elements of a woodlands stewardship program be defined this year to assist in introducing the new bylaw January 1.

- That legal and planning staff enter into discussions with local municipalities and Conservation Halton on a process for the administration and enforcement of the new bylaw and report back to council prior to January 1, and bring forward the financial implications during budget deliberations.

- That staff, after consultation with the Halton Agricultural Advisory Committee and the Ecological and Environmental Advisory Committee, report back to council on a protocol for defining normal farm practices and good forestry practices for the application of the new bylaw.

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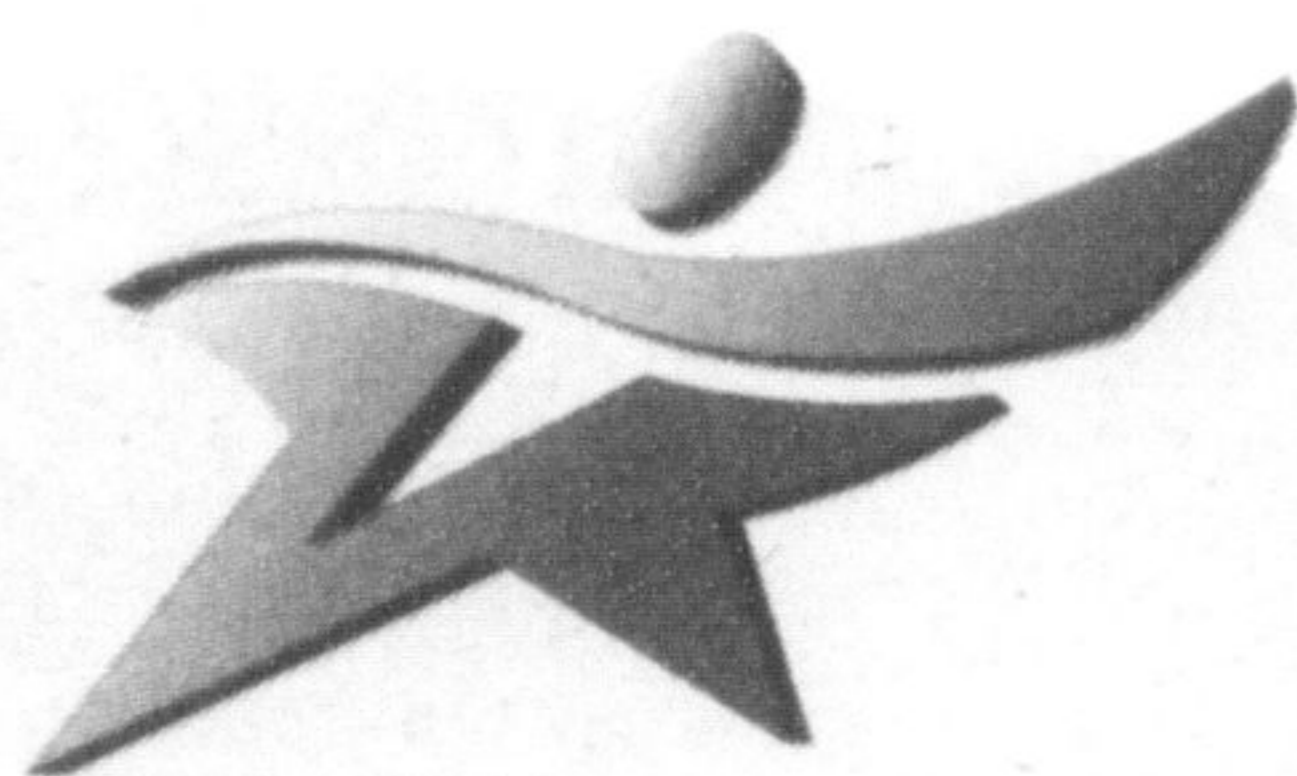
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