

Subject: The proposed bylaw amendment (6615 - tree cutting provision, put forward by Councillor Crist

Date: Fri, 14 Feb 2003 09:55:49 -0800

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A MESSAGE FROM ERNIE CRIST

The existing Tree Cutting Bylaw 6515 was well intentioned but it turned out to be nothing more than a bureaucratic boondoggle and nightmare at the expense of District residents. As a result, I have introduced a motion that Bylaw 6615 - tree cutting provision for private properties in single family residential zones - be amended. Under the proposed amendment owners of private properties in single family residential zones will be responsible for the safety of their own trees rather than the District bureaucrats who, quite frankly, have failed to implement the bylaw with consistency, common sense and fairness.

The reasons for my amendment of this Bylaw are, in the main, as followsthe vast majority of North Shore residents will go to great lengths to preserve trees on their own property. Most of them understand full well the importance of trees in maintaining the ambiance and quality of life on the North Shore. They know that trees provide vital oxygen in an otherwise threatened and polluted environment. Indeed, judging by the record, they have far more respect for the preservation of trees than the District ever had. In general, the people who don't care about trees are developers. But their enthusiasm for tree cutting to maximize building space, as the record also shows, has very seldom been dampened by the District.

The existing Bylaw does not differentiate between stable trees such as Firs and Cedars, on one hand, and Hemlocks etc, on the other. Large Hemlocks, for instance, are prime candidates for being toppled during storms and without warning. It is a miracle that nobody has been killed or seriously injured so far. The existing bylaw does not differentiate between trees in ecologically sensitive areas and those that are not. Trees on flat lots are treated the same way as those on slopes or adjacent to streams etc. But the most serious flaw of the Bylaw is that it has never been upheld in an unbiased and sensible fashion by the District.

In one instance, an elderly couple pleaded to preserve three beautiful healthy trees on a District boulevard adjacent to their home. But the trees were cut because BC Hydro thought that the telephone lines were too close to the branches. In other cases, however, trees clearly posing a hazard (Hemlocks), no matter how tall, had to stay, they decreed.

A senior, who could no longer climb on his roof nor afford to pay someone to clean both roof and gutters incessantly of needles from adjacent pine trees, pleaded with the District to have them replaced with trees less troublesome and at his own expense - he was turned down. It even came to a vote on Council but the District bureaucracy backed by Council won. In other cases, when roots ruined not only the foundation of homes but also retaining walls, the District, after spending countless "bureaucracy" hours including in some cases the Manager's time, said no - common sense notwithstanding.


On the other hand while playing hard ball on single family lots, the District has had no compunction in allowing the elimination of scores of trees to

accommodate development. In the last few years, hundreds of development variance and rezoning applications, have been approved, many of them involving the cutting of trees. District Council, including the Councillor posing as an "environmentalist", voted in favor of virtually all such applications. No problem there.

The same is true for massive developments such as Canadian Tire for example which is now a concrete plaza. Some years ago, they even wanted to remove Cove and Mountain Forest to make way for a massive housing project. It was only after the public protested with thousands of signatures on a petition that the Council gave way. Even the land on which the Northlands Golf Course is now located was targeted for a big housing project - no concern about trees there either. The Lynn Valley Community Plan envisioned a tree lined boulevard but the trees were sacrificed to placate the developers even though it was contrary to the plan and contrary to what was promised to the people of Lynn Valley. No problem there either.

Since my proposal to review Bylaw 6615 was announced recently, a number of genuine environmental groups have come forward, voicing their concerns about making changes to the Bylaw. This includes the Stream Keepers. I am convinced however, that their concerns can be addressed as the Bylaw is coming up for debate. At the same time, I believe we need to inject a measure of common sense in this issue. I am loath to leave the matter of hazardous trees on private properties in single family residential zones in the hands of bureaucrats who, judging by their attitude, have shown concern not so much for the preservation of trees but the preservation of their bureaucratic empire at the expense of common sense and the legitimate safety concerns of homeowners.

Ernie Crist

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