Residents want say on cutting surviving trees

By Brock Weir

A new housing lot near Bayview and Vandorf Road has raised some concerns from surrounding neighbours after a homeowner applied to remove three trees from his lot.

The two sugar maples and one black locust on Longthorp Court property were slated for removal pending Council's decision last week.

The lot in question was previously occupied by the heritage designated Allen Brown House. According to Marco Ramunno, Aurora's Director of Planning, one of the provisions to building on the site of the relocated home, even after its move, was the heritage designation for its surrounding trees were kept in place ? including the three in question.

An arborist's report indicated that two of the three trees are in ?good condition? with one coming in merely as fair, said Mr. Ramunno.

?The report also makes recommendations that one of the trees will require bracing to provide additional support and that grading and disturbance of the root zones of the trees is not recommended,? said Mr. Ramunno.

The recommendation to remove the trees was subject to Council debate at the committee level last week. Property owner Chris Kotsopoulous delegated to Council to persuade them to approve the tree removal because keeping things as they are would adversely affect grading and, consequently, drainage on his property.

Part of the problem, he added, is the trees were originally planted two close together and while too of the three come together to form an impressive canopy, if one tree was removed, that canopy would be halved.

?All three of these trees are sitting on a plateau that is over a metre higher than the grade of the walkout basement on the rear of the house,? he said. ?This higher ground is about six metres from the back of the house and it is causing water to pool towards the house versus away from it to the catch basins that are there.?

On hand to hear the arguments were seven neighbouring residents. According to Councillor Sandra Humfryes, these residents requested more time to make their arguments to Council on why the trees should stay in place. She requested a final decision be delayed until September 17 giving neighbours time to consider both their own arguments and those of Council and make a delegation to state their case.

?The residents would like an opportunity to understand the report a bit further, have some discussions with staff and make a delegation if they can as these trees do impact the neighbourhood as well,? said Councillor Humfryes.

The request to defer for a couple of weeks was supported by Mayor Geoffrey Dawe who also requested more information on the landowner's grading concerns.

Also supporting the motion to defer was Councillor Michael Thompson who questioned whether all property owners in the area were aware of the special conditions put on these trees. Mr. Ramunno said most of the neighbours were aware of the situation and he has had discussions with many of them himself.

?They purchased their homes on the belief that the trees would stay and [need] an opportunity to address their concerns,? said Councillor Thompson.

For others, such as Councillors Evelyn Buck and John Gallo, the deferral vote last week was slightly premature. From Councillor

Buck's perspective, if they had the debate on the matter last week and waited until this week's Council meeting to postpone a decision, it would give residents in the audience a much better idea of their positions and points to consider when making their own delegations.

Nevertheless, looking at the photos provided of some of the grading that had already taken place on the side, she expressed concern that the damage had already been done.

?Sugar maple have surface roots that spread all over,? she said, looking at cuts into the ground just over a metre in depth. ?Depending on how close that cut was made in the ground, that tree would [have lost quite a bit of its roots already. I can see roots that appear to be coming out of the trees. What I am interested in is how much damage was done to the trees already when the excavation was made.?