

Ag Advisory Board – Summary of position with respect to the Forestry Bylaw Review

In listening to the Council Meeting of February 15th, 2022, we would acknowledge that the feedback provided in response to the Forestry Bylaw review expressed by Mayor and Council covered the majority of the points that the AAB have considered.

Norfolk County has the highest percentage of forested land in Southwestern, with approximately 25% of the landscape in Norfolk County as forest cover. A large proportion of this forested land is owned and managed by agricultural landowners.

The KEY items discussed by the AAB are as follows:

(1) The importance of acknowledging provincial right to farm / normal farm practices legislation

- This provincial legislation is acknowledged by Norfolk County's current Forestry Supervisor.
- Including normal farm practice terminology in the bylaw maintains clarity for anyone reading the bylaw as a reference and also provides acknowledgement of provincial legislation in the future for interpretation of the bylaw beyond current forestry staff.

(2) Support not regulating woodlots smaller than 1 Ha in size

- Regulation of woodlots greater than 1 Ha is supported in many counties and is referenced in provincial legislation.
- Supports current scale of agriculture operations.
- Aligns more appropriately the scale of regulation to the scale of landscape in forest cover.
- Values the economics of County resources and the cost of regulating small parcels of forested cover which shows respect to taxpayers and provides an appreciation for economies of scale of the forested coverage in Norfolk County.

To note – The original review of the draft bylaw in the winter of 2021 in which formal comments were received from the community and stakeholders had the regulated woodlots at greater than 1 Ha. The AAB at that time fully supported the draft by-law at the greater than 1 Ha regulation in the initial draft bylaw review. It is understood that this has been changed now after original stakeholder review. The AAB would like to note that more comments/feedback may have been submitted at the initial forestry bylaw review if the regulation of woodlots less than 1 Ha was proposed at the initial bylaw review.

(3) That the forestry bylaw fully supports future innovative uses / management of woodlands that can add economic value to the landowners i.e., silvopasture

- Support innovation in Norfolk County.
- Acknowledges that there are methods to managing woodlots beyond traditional wood harvest.
- Recognizes that agroforestry practices are relevant and provides alternative forestry management.

(4) Acknowledges that bylaw officers have the right to enter an owner's land should they have reason to believe that an act that contravenes the bylaw is being committed. However, the AAB requests that wording in the bylaw be changed to include "that Bylaw Officer makes a reasonable effort to make contact with the landowner prior to entering their property".

- Provides respect and reasonableness to the land-owners property.
- Provides for good relations with landowners / taxpayers.
- Deescalates potential confrontation.
- Acknowledges the biosecurity requirements of visitors.
- Reduces risk to County staff of onsite risks that may not be known to them (i.e., hunting on property).

(5) Do not support the regulation of tree fence rows / wind breaks in the bylaw

- Farmers planted windbreaks in previous generations as a good agriculture practice.
- As farm practices change so does the need for tree rows and wind breaks. Many farm operations have moved to less tillage as such wind erosion is reduced and so is the need for wind breaks.
- Farm size is increasing, and number of operations is reducing, as such it is desirable in some situations to join parcels of land by removing fence rows.
- May provide unnecessary use of county resources if regulated.