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Failed Democracy at City Hall on Private Tree By-law Issue

Burlington, ON – BurlingtonGreen is dismayed to report that the majority of city council voted on July 8th to take a pass at learning more about a private tree protection by-law for our city.

At the onset of the meeting, council members clearly stated that no decision would be made until the fall because controversial issues are not dealt with during the summer when so many citizens are unable to participate and provide input. Although the Mayor stated "no decision will be made" in a news bulletin he sent out to the public on July 5th, after a few hours of delegations and discussions, Committee Council proceeded with a 5 to 2 vote that essentially "killed" the opportunity to explore options regarding a private property tree by-law for Burlington. Only Mayor Goldring supported Councillor Marianne Meed-Ward's motion that would have kept the issue alive for a fall discussion and vote.

"Their premature decision betrays the public's trust and sends a significant (and disturbing) message to developers as well as to residents: Go ahead, cut away, because you aren't in Hamilton, Oakville, Mississauga, Toronto, and the many other cities that are protecting their tree canopies by adopting a private tree protection by-law", says Colin Brock, a BurlingtonGreen Board Director who delegated to Council on the issue.

Results of the City's recent feasibility study on the issue revealed the majority of Burlington residents believe more needs to be done by the city to protect trees and would comply with a practical by-law. BurlingtonGreen is concerned and disappointed that city staff provided a recommendation to Council to not support a private tree by-law as their understanding was that staff were to report back on the feasibility study findings only.

There is controversy on the issue in large part due to a misinformation of the facts. Residents from Oakville shared their experience and how their tree by-law is not onerous to the homeowner and does allow for the removal of trees for reasonable purposes. The by-law is supported by their Town's Council as they recognize that a key purpose of the by-law is to prevent developers from removing property trees before they apply for a building permit. BurlingtonGreen expects that more trees will be threatened in Burlington due to increasing infill development where developers are looking to remove mature trees in order to build larger homes on existing properties.

Burlington's Urban Forest Management Plan that was earlier endorsed by Council states that "Protecting existing trees, particularly larger specimens, prior to and during construction has been shown to be more effective in sustaining the provision of urban forest benefits than planting new trees." "This further exemplifies what we believe to be a contradiction of what was conveyed by staff and the results that transpired on July 8 at City Hall", said Mr. Brock.

To learn more about this issue, the importance of trees and how you can get involved, please visit <http://www.burlingtongreen.org/>

- 30 -

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