

To: Oxford County Warden and Council  
From: The Oxford Coalition for Social Justice  
Re: The Woodland Conservation By-Law  
Date: May 15, 2018

The Oxford Coalition for Social Justice and its environmental wing, sometimes known as the Green Earth Campaign, is pleased that the Woodlands Conservation By-Law of 2004 is now being reconsidered, expanded and brought into line with the aspirations of the community as expressed in various ways including through the consultations in the creation of the Future Oxford Sustainability Plan, previous and subsequent forums of discussion. We are glad to several elements in the introductory portions of the current draft including –

- sustaining the community's environmental and natural heritage resources
- conserving and improving woodlands, and
- enhancing biodiversity and forest resilience....adapting to climate change, and other environmental threats to forest health.

There is much more in the various sections of the document, some of them expansions, some of them clarifications.

The Oxford Coalition for Social Justice is particularly aware of the several negative factors for forest health which have resulted in a loss to the total stock of trees and to the extirpation of at least one species. The devastation caused by the Emerald Ash Borer has been particularly evident in some locations. Continued cutting for housing or other developments and the loss of road-side fence-row trees are to be decried. The Oxford Coalition for Social Justice therefore recommends the following:

- More effective enforcement of provisions to stop the damaging, injury and cutting of trees unlawfully, and higher fines for doing so. \$400 is not a sufficient deterrent, nor does it allow for replacement of adult trees
- Attention to biomass rather than number of trees as a way to quantify tree planting, growth or removal. This would mean that a 6 inch sapling would not be considered as important as a 15 foot tree moved into a devastated areas nor as significant as an adult tree, depending on species
- Added requirements for replanting to recognize the duration of life of some slow-growing species among the Carolinian trees which would be chosen to enhance the biodiversity and forest resilience to climate change. The northward march of animal species due to warmer climate cannot be matched by the trees without our (and therefore, the County's) assistance.
- Heightened awareness of the value of trees alongside roads where sidewalk and widening projects are perhaps not warranted by the real traffic nor by long-term trends toward active and/or shared transportation, as well as alongside country roads where fence-line trees are being removed and not often replaced

- Reconsideration of the “wildlife corridor” concept between woodlands to ensure that they have enough tree cover to make it apparently safe to animals as well as for their benefits to human populations, erosion prevention and provision of habitat.

Agro-forestry is being discovered as an improvement after years of forest mismanagement around the world according to John Vidal, Olivier Ranke, Fabian Liagre, Christian Dupraz as well as Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. Agro-forestry aligns with Oxford County’s goal of 10 000 tree plantings annually. That goal would be moot if more than 10 000 trees are lost due to planned harvesting, exemptions in the bylaw, illegal tree removal and natural factors. Thus, agro-forestry might well encourage the growth of apple trees on lands that had previously been farmed for grains, bedding or animal feed to increase both soil retention and fertility rather than including them in exemptions.

With its strong agricultural production, Oxford County is a natural place where the improvement in size and health of woodlands can contribute to economic, community and environmental sustainability. The Oxford Coalition for Social Justice commends the efforts of Oxford County and many partners to protect and improve forest health and resilience through this by-law and other measures. Medical and atmospheric sciences agree on the benefits of growing biomass. Trees are the largest examples of such. We encourage Oxford County to lead the way into a green, sustainable, forested and diverse future not down the stony path to higher exemptions and lowered expectations.