

north shore news

Mathers residents bemoan tree cuts

[Jane Seyd](#) / North Shore News

May 7, 2014 12:00 AM



West Vancouver neighbours Rainer Fassler and Laurie McNeil are concerned about tree removal on private property in the 1100-block of Mathers Avenue. Photo Mike Wakefield, North Shore News

The District of West Vancouver is considering the need for a bylaw that would regulate tree cutting on private property after residents on Mathers Avenue complained about the chopping of mature cedar trees in their neighbourhood.

Laurie McNeil, who lives at 1130 Mathers Ave., said she was appalled when the new owner of the property next door to her chopped down a number of large trees on his lot that had been part of the neighbourhood character for decades.

"This neighbourhood has residents who have been here 30, 40 and 50 years," she said, who have been shocked to see the sudden changes.

The loss of large trees in the neighbourhood affects privacy, noise, shade, habitat for wildlife and possibly slope stability, said McNeil.

McNeil said she recently wrote to council about the issue after becoming concerned about the pace of tree removal in the municipality - an issue that has also attracted attention recently in the City of Vancouver.

Without a tree-cutting bylaw to regulate what happens on private property, "What's going to happen in 10 years?" said McNeil. "It's not five and it's not 10 and it's not 20 (trees being taken down in the municipality each year). It's more like 100."

Rainer Fassler is another neighbour on Mathers Avenue who says the municipality should do more to protect heritage trees on private property.

Fassler said when the house sold recently, he was happy to hear the new owner intended to renovate rather than knocking it down.

"Next thing you know there's a major logging operation and (the trees) get chopped down," he said.

Fassler said it's time the municipality looked at greater controls.

"If West Vancouver had a bylaw that dealt with trees on private property, there would at least have been a conversation," he said.

"Not every tree would be saved," he added. But he said at least there would be checks and balances.

Currently, "a totally arbitrary decision can be made by an owner that affects the whole neighbourhood," he said.

Fassler said he also worries about increasing numbers of trees in West Vancouver being cut down in the interests of unobstructed views.

"There could be a future where we look up or down the hill and there's just houses," he said.

"What's a good view?" he added. "A good view can be interrupted by some trees."

In the most recent example on Mathers Avenue, the municipal arborist was called out to investigate after the company that had been cutting the trees began to limb branches on trees that were on nearby public property.

"Residents don't have the right to cut trees on municipal property," said Jeff McDonald, spokesman for the municipality.

Unless the trees are near a creek, there are no bylaws in West Vancouver that regulate tree cutting on private property, unlike a number of other municipalities that have varying levels of restrictions.

The District of North Vancouver, for instance, requires permits to cut trees with diameters larger than 75 centimetres and trees of certain species.

A similar bylaw might be considered for West Vancouver, given the "emotion and passion that trees arouse in this community," said McDonald.

"It's an issue a lot of people in West Vancouver care about."

Staff are now examining the issue and coming up with recommendations.

At a recent West Vancouver council meeting, the issue prompted some discussion.

"The standard modus of the builders is you knock everything down on the lot and you start from scratch," said Coun. Craig Cameron on April 28.

"I don't think the present situation where we have absolutely no tree-cutting bylaw is something we should continue without seriously examining it."

Cameron noted the loss of trees in the City of Vancouver over the past 10 or 15 years has been shocking.

He said he'd like some options to consider for changing the status quo.

Coun. Bill Soprovich warned the issue of treecutting bylaws could be very contentious with homeowners.

"It's going to be a hard, long fight to come to a conclusion," he warned. "We can do it, but it's not going to happen tomorrow."

© North Shore News