

Councillor charges Town failing to protect Environmentally Sensitive Areas (Oakville Beaver, A4 – Kim Arnott)

The plight of Iroquois Shoreline Woods was the springboard, and Ward 4 councillor Allan Elgar used it to dive headfirst into the predicament of Oakville's environmentally sensitive areas on Monday night.

After council voted unanimously to commit to preserving the ailing 35-hectare Iroquois Shoreline woodlot, Elgar noted that several other local environmentally sensitive areas are in equal need of sympathy and attention.

In a presentation entitled, "How well has Oakville council protected its Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESA)?," Elgar concluded that the Town has done a poor job.

In particular, he drew attention to Wildflower Woods and Joshua Creek Valley.

Both are officially designated environmentally sensitive areas that have been damaged so badly the region is contemplating removing their designations.

Wildflower Woods, located near the Ford Plant, was designated an ESA in 1978, but has decreased in size since then due to the construction of Ford Drive and residential development.

The most significant portions of the ESA - a wet meadow, open pond and marsh - were destroyed by development, noted Elgar.

"The remaining area no longer contains the range and type of biodiversity that would qualify it to be an ESA," he added.

The Joshua Creek Valley has suffered a similar fate.

Also designated in 1978, it has suffered the loss of its distinctive sand dunes and been "negatively impacted by surrounding residential development."

Along with creek floods, the region has noted that the area has been damaged by planned and unplanned trail systems.

In the case of Iroquois Shoreline Woods, about half of the area originally designated as an ESA has already been developed, and the remaining portion is being seriously impacted by oak decline.

Elgar also pointed to Bronte Burloak Woods and the Tableland Woodlot, both areas previously designated as ESAs, which have since been lost.

"In my opinion, we have failed to protect the environment and very few people are aware of the degradation of our ESAs," said Elgar.

Mayor Ann Mulvale described Elgar's presentation as "a naked tree," adding, "There's a whole lot of foliage that needs to be put on it to put it in context."

But several Town councillors appeared sobered by Elgar's presentation. "This shows what can happen if an area like (Iroquois Shoreline Woods) is allowed to decline," said councillor Kevin Flynn. "I'm hoping it's not too late to turn back."

Following the presentation, council approved a motion asking town staff to report back on the status of the town's environmentally sensitive areas, along with potential ways to rehabilitate Joshua Creek Valley and Wildflower Woods.

"I think it's really important to keep at least what we have left, before we pave it over," said Elgar.

But Mulvale noted, "We haven't paved it over. We're continuing to protect (the ESAs).

"It's a matter of whether you keep them well - that's the bigger challenge."