

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE – MARCH 26, 2007

PRIVACY FENCING AND SCREENING ALONG PUBLIC ROADS

Recommendations

The Commissioner of Engineering and Public Works recommends:

1. That this report BE RECEIVED for information purposes; and
2. That the City's current practice of not requiring enhanced plantings alongside privacy fences adjacent to local public road allowances within subdivisions be maintained.

Economic Impact

There are no immediate budgetary impacts resulting from the adoption of this report.

Communications Plan

N/A

Purpose

This report has been prepared in response to Council's request to review the concerns expressed by Members of Council related to privacy fencing and plantings adjacent to public road allowances within subdivisions.

Background – Analysis and Options

Item 32, Report No. 25 of the Committee of the Whole, which was adopted without amendment by the Council of the City of Vaughan on May 8, 2006, recommended:

“That staff bring forward a report to address the concerns expressed by Members of Council with respect to privacy fencing and ensuring that all future subdivisions that require privacy fences along public roads, also include plantings.”

Current City Policy / Criteria

Privacy fencing is typically placed along the flankage of corner lots adjacent to a public road to ensure adequate screening for the amenity areas of residential dwelling units. This fencing is placed entirely within private property and is maintained by the homeowner. Warning clauses to this effect are placed in all Purchase and Sale Agreements as required by the Subdivision Agreement.

Privacy fences are typically designed to be uniform in appearance throughout a development area in accordance with the approved urban design guidelines and the architectural control guidelines for the community. Additional plantings adjacent to these privacy fences would enhance the aesthetics of the community. The plantings however would have to be placed within the boulevard areas of the municipal right-of-way immediately adjacent to the required fencing. Current City right-of-way standards allow for a 1.0 metre offset consisting of sodded boulevard area from the property line to the edge of the concrete sidewalk. The placement of additional landscape plantings may cause potential utility conflicts in the event that repair and/or maintenance works would be required within the boulevard areas. Additional repair and retrofit costs would be incurred in this situation.

Alternatively, additional landscape plantings may be located entirely within private property

thereby requiring that the privacy fence be installed approximately 1-2 metres inside of the property line. This option is not feasible, as there would certainly be concerns by individual homeowners regarding the reduction of their usable side and/or backyard amenity areas as a result of the space requirements for the plantings.

The City's Parks and Forestry staff note that the current practice is to provide plantings and enhanced landscaping adjacent to privacy/noise attenuation fencing along community edges within the boulevards of Regional roads. With respect to having plantings installed adjacent to all privacy fences that are located alongside local City roads, cost considerations associated with long term maintenance, upkeep and replacement need to be evaluated. Additional maintenance and staffing costs related to such landscaped planting along privacy fencing should also be considered.

As noted by Parks and Forestry staff, the physical constraints, limitation and conflicts within the boulevard areas of the municipal right-of-way include the fact that:

- all planting beds require a minimum setback of 1.0 metre from the edge of a sidewalk or any hard surface that requires winter maintenance;
- if planting beds are too close to sidewalks snow loading will damage shrubs; snow removal equipment will also damage shrubs; and shrub debris, soil & mulch can fall onto walkways and become tripping hazards;
- all planting beds located adjacent to pedestrian walkways must take into consideration Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles (ie. shrubs must be low enough so they do not create hidden/problem areas, typically less than 60 centimetres in height);
- selected species must be drought tolerant, non-invasive and able to withstand the effects of de-icing salts;
- this type of area can often become a problem for litter or garbage collecting; and
- planting beds should have a maintenance access strip at rear of bed for maintenance access to fencing.

Additional maintenance costs for the planting beds will result based on the following general requirements:

- yearly mulching;
- weeding two times per month during the growing season;
- pruning two times per year; and
- a minimum of two litter pick-ups per month during the growing season.

Parks and Forestry staff advise that based on an average planting bed size of approximately 65 square metres (1.3m x 50m) and the above noted minimum maintenance requirements, it is estimated that each planting bed will cost \$10,000 per year. This excludes any required replacement costs for planting beds which may be damaged.

Viable landscape planting alongside of privacy fences adjacent to public roads need to be non-obtrusive and low lying to allow for adequate vehicular visibility at all times. They would need to be hardy and require minimal maintenance (such as pruning and watering). However, there are associated replacement costs resulting from winter salting, sidewalk plowing, etc.

Relationship to Vaughan Vision 2007

In consideration of the strategic priorities related to service delivery excellence as established by Vaughan Vision 2007, the recommendations of this report will assist in establishing and communicating service level standards that are affordable and sustainable; and in respecting the review of enforcement, compliance and monitoring of regulations related to public safety.

This report is therefore consistent with the priorities previously set by Council.

Regional Implications

N/A

Conclusion

The requirement for additional plantings adjacent to privacy fencing would enhance the aesthetic appearance of the community. These plantings would be located within the public road allowance thereby requiring regular maintenance by the City. The plantings would need to be low lying (so as to not interfere with vehicular visibility), non-obtrusive (so as to not interfere with boulevard utilities) and requiring minimal maintenance. However, there is a significant cost consideration resulting from general upkeep and potential replacement. It is therefore recommended that the City's current practice of not requiring enhanced plantings alongside privacy fences adjacent to local public road allowances within subdivisions be maintained.

Attachments

N/A

Report prepared by

Michael Frieri, Development Supervisor, Engineering Planning & Studies, Ext. 8729
Irfan Arab, Manager of Development Services, Ext. 8250

Respectfully submitted,

Bill Robinson, P. Eng.
Commissioner of Engineering and Public Works

Michael Won, P. Eng.
Director of Development/
Transportation Engineering