

Deputy-Mayor pushes for land bylaw

South Glengarry's Deputy-Mayor is upset council wasn't informed about a local farmer who was clearing trees from a portion of a green road near his Lancaster Township property.

"We didn't know about this," Deputy-Mayor Bill McKenzie said during a council meeting earlier this month. "Nobody came to us as a council and asked, 'Is this okay?' We didn't know about it until it was brought up by one of the landowners.

The green road in question is an unopened road allowance running east-west between Concession 4 and 5, Lancaster Township on the east side of SDG 34.

The road, which goes through a very well-maintained forest, has been used for recreational purposes for the past 50 years according to neighbouring land owner Gordon Ferguson.

Regardless of the fact that it has been an unwritten policy to allow farmers to work municipal lands, Mr. MacKenzie believes that council should have the right to decide what

to do on township property.

He would like to have a bylaw enacted that safeguards legitimate municipal interests with respect to Rights-of-Way, green roads, and any other municipally owned land.

"There are taxpayers involved on all sides here ...," he said. "We have to come out of here with something that gives us (council) the right to decide, especially if it's on our (township) property."

Since it has been normal practice, for agricultural purposes, that the township typically allows adjacent property owners to clear the right-of-way, Ewen MacDonald, South Glengarry General Manager of Infrastructure Services gave farmer Martin Stadelmann permission to clear the portion of the green road bordering his property.

"I know that Mr. Ferguson would be disappointed with that decision, but it is our practice, that for agricultural purposes, we typically allow the abutting property owner to clear the right-of-way," he said. "So he was given permission to clear the northern half of this

right-of-way."

Councillor Joyce Gravelle stated that farmers should not make the assumption that it is okay to clear the land without proper authorization.

"Road allowances are there because they are needed for specific purposes, not for turn-arounds or for planting grass," she said. "If there are trees on them, and we don't need them for road allowance, perhaps we should leave the trees there."

For his part, Mayor Ian McLeod noted that while allowances have been made to farmers for accessing property where no other avenue was available, compromises and solutions now need to be sought in this land use debate.

"We have to have some flexibility," he said. "But as far as alterations on a right-of-way, no one can alter a right-of-way without getting permission from the municipality. Now' in this case, if staff gave direction and you feel it should have been council, then we need to include that in our policy." — Wendy Beswick