

**Region of Waterloo**  
**Planning, Development, and Legislative Services**  
**Community Planning**

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**To:** Licensing and Hearings Committee  
**Meeting Date:** August 28, 2024  
**Report Title:** Conestoga Meats Woodland Removal Permit

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**1. Recommendation**

For Direction:

Option 1:

That the Regional Municipality of Waterloo issue a conditional “Woodland Removal Permit” to Conestoga Meats as requested in Appendix A, subject to completion, to the satisfaction of the Commissioner, Planning, Development, and Legislative Services, of the conditions of approval outlined in Appendix B of report PDL-CPL-24-016 dated August 28, 2024.

Option 2:

That the Regional Municipality of Waterloo decline the Woodland Removal Permit submitted by Conestoga Meats as requested in Appendix A of report PDL-CPL-24-016 dated August 28, 2024.

**2. Purpose / Issue:**

The purpose of this report is to provide Regional Council with options for consideration in the evaluation of a request submitted by Conestoga Meats for a Woodland Removal Permit.

**3. Strategic Plan:**

This report has bearing on the Climate Aligned Growth priorities of the 2023-2027 Corporate Strategic Plan, as the protection of Regional Core Environmental Features will directly support climate and sustainability objectives. The report also has implications for the Homes for All priority, as expansion of local businesses will support economic development objectives and a thriving local economy.

**4. Report Highlights:**

- Conestoga Meats is seeking a Woodland Removal Permit for a 14.4 hectare

woodland located between 313 Menno Street, Breslau, and 1755 Lonsdale Road, Breslau. The permit has been requested to facilitate the expansion of operations to a new facility that will be established at the site where the existing woodland is located. This site is directly adjacent to their existing location (Appendix C) and is currently owned by the applicant.

- This expansion of operations will allow Conestoga Meats to increase production, fulfill applicable fire and safety objectives, improve employee and visitor welfare and experiences, and support future growth with more efficient equipment layouts. In addition, space allocations are being considered for local businesses and community groups to support shared community goals.
- The woodland is designated as a Core Environmental Feature (Significant Woodland) in the Regional Official Plan. Regional policies prohibit removal of or development in Core Environmental Features.
- The Woodland Conservation by-law allows for Woodland Removal permits if sufficient evidence is provided demonstrating that “the injuring or destruction of the tree or trees is desirable for the appropriate development or use of the property and the general intent and purpose of [the] By-law is maintained.”
- An inventory conducted on behalf of the applicant by Terrastory Environmental Consulting (Appendix D) concluded that for the foreseeable future the woodland is expected to continue to function as a late-successional forest community dominated by mature trees with limited evidence of degradation or decline. Environmental Planning staff reviewed the inventory report and visited the site, and have determined that this is a healthy, mature woodland characterized by undisturbed interior forest habitat that supports a mix of sensitive species.
- In recognition of the complexity of this permit application, two options are presented for consideration by Council.

### **Option 1 – Approve Permit**

- If it is determined by Council that removal of this woodland is desirable for the development of this property, it is recommended that the permit be approved subject to the conditions described in Appendix B.
- Risks associated with this option include a temporary or permanent loss of some or all ecological functions and services currently provided by the existing woodland, even if a robust replacement plan is implemented. Replacement of a mature forest ecosystem is a complex task that involves a lengthy time horizon and ongoing management and maintenance to ensure a satisfactory mix of overstory and understory trees of diverse ages and species, and to support the growth of shrubs and herbaceous species.

- Benefits associated with this option include the provision of economic development opportunities for this growing local business and its partners. The new facility proposed by Conestoga Meats will encourage employment opportunities that may benefit the entire region. In addition, the applicant is proposing to provide tree planting and ecological restoration activities on site to offset the loss of the woodland. While a full replication of the existing woodland feature is unlikely, some ecological benefits will be achieved through this work.

### **Option 2 – Decline Permit**

- If it is determined by Council that the removal of this woodland is not desirable for the development of this property, it is recommended that the permit application be declined.
- Risks associated with this option include a delay in the expansion of operations for the applicant, who have noted that the existing facilities are preventing efficient equipment layouts and operations. If the applicant is not able to identify a suitable alternative site, the economic development opportunities associated with the expansion of facilities may be lost.
- Benefits associated with this option include the protection of the existing woodlot feature and the sensitive flora and fauna species it supports due to its mature and undisturbed structure.

### **5. Background:**

The purpose of the Region’s Woodland Conservation By-law (By-law 08-026) is “sustaining a healthy natural environment while also having regard to good forestry practices.” Permits to cut (“injure or destroy”) trees are issued in cases where it is determined that the proposed tree cutting meets the stated purpose of the Region’s Woodland Conservation By-law. The Region can issue a “Woodland Removal Permit” pursuant to the by-law, section 6 (a):

“The owner of a property where a woodland is located, in whole or in part, or any person authorized in writing by the owner, may apply for a Woodland Removal Permit and the Tree By-law Committee may issue a Woodland Removal Permit to allow the injuring or destruction of a tree or trees of a protected species in the owner’s portion of the woodland, if in the opinion of the Tree By-law Committee, the injuring or destruction of the tree or trees is desirable for the appropriate development or use of the property and the general intent and purpose of this By-law is maintained.”

The Woodland Conservation By-law does not apply to tree removals proposed as part of development activity under Planning Act applications. As no Planning Act application has been submitted for the Conestoga Meats properties on which the woodland is located, a Woodland Removal Permit is the vehicle by which the applicant is seeking to

remove the woodland. The applicant has acknowledged that development is the aspiration for the site.

The Woodland Removal Permit application submitted by Conestoga Meats was accompanied by a detailed vegetation review report prepared by Terrastory Environmental Consulting (Appendix D), a planning justification report (Appendix E), and a high-level framework for woodland compensation (Appendix D).

The permit has been reviewed against the following requirements for approval:

1. **Woodland determination:** Approval of a permit requires that a woodland condition exists as defined by the Woodland Conservation By-law. Through a standardized forestry sampling process, Terrastory Environmental Consulting concluded that the numbers of naturally occurring native species per hectare were such that the wooded area in question meets the definition of a woodland. Environmental Planning staff support this determination.
2. **Natural development:** Approval of a permit requires that the applicant provide a professional opinion on the natural development and condition of the woodland. Terrastory Environmental Consulting concluded that “for the foreseeable future the woodland is expected to continue to function as a late-successional forest community dominated by mature trees with limited evidence of degradation or decline”. Environmental Planning staff support this characterization. Furthermore, given the desirable size, shape, and health of this woodland feature, Environmental Planning staff are unable to support the approval of this permit when considered in the context of principles of landscape ecology.
3. **Appropriate use or development:** Approval of a permit requires that the proposed woodland removal supports the appropriate development or use of the property. The planning justification report submitted by Conestoga Meats (Appendix E) outlines the rationale for the selection of this site for the planned expansion of facilities. The comprehensive evaluation of the site plan will be completed when a development application is submitted to the Township and the Region by the applicant. However, staff are generally supportive of the expansion of operations, not withstanding the environmental impacts.

The applicant has proposed several measures to mitigate the loss of ecological functions and services provided by the existing woodland feature (Appendix A), including tree planting around the proposed new facilities, an off-site tree planting program implemented by members of the co-operative that owns Conestoga Meats, and a proposal to provide funding to support community tree planting initiatives. Although these measures will provide tree cover and associated benefits, they are not likely to replicate the interior woodland habitat that currently exists in absence of a suitable forest patch size, shape, and surrounding landscape influence. If Council chooses to

approve this permit request, the proposed conditions of approval (Appendix B) will aim to achieve a self-sustaining hardwood forest on a similarly sized parcel of land and with dimensions suitable for possible development of interior woodland habitat.

## **6. Communication and Engagement with Area Municipalities and the Public**

**Area Municipalities:** A draft copy of this report was circulated to the Township of Woolwich and Grand River Conservation Authority (GRCA).

**Public:** When an application for a “Woodland Removal Permit” has been submitted for consideration by Committee, section 6(c) of the by-law requires that the Clerk provide public notice prior to the Licensing and Hearings Committee date. The notice must be at least 10 days prior to the Committee date, to all property owners within 120 metres of the property and shall include the following:

- the location of the property on which the Woodland Removal Permit is sought;
- the nature and purpose of the Woodland Removal Permit sought; and
- the date, time and location of the Licensing and Hearings Committee meeting where the application for the Woodland Removal Permit will be considered.

Notice was delivered by Licensing and Enforcement Services staff to 12 property owners on July 31, 2024.

## **7. Financial Implications:**

The required \$1000.00 fee was included with the submission of the permit application.

## **8. Conclusion / Next Steps:**

Regional staff will implement Regional Council’s decision regarding the Woodland Removal Permit application submitted by Conestoga Meats. Should a conditional permit be approved, staff will work with the applicant, the Township of Woolwich, and GRCA to fulfill the conditions of approval.

## **9. Attachments:**

Appendix A: Application for Woodland Removal Permit - Conestoga Meats

Appendix B: Proposed Conditions of Approval

Appendix C: Location of Target Woodland

Appendix D: Environmental Impact Statement and Existing Vegetation Report (Terrastory)

Appendix E: Planning Justification Report

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**Reviewed By:** Danielle De Fields, Director, Community Planning

**Approved By:** Rod Regier, Commissioner, Planning, Development and Legislative Services