

Ontario Beekeepers' Association Position Statement

Beekeeping Considerations for Municipal Bylaw Development

May 2025

Background

Beekeeping in Ontario is regulated by the [Ontario Bees Act](#), RSO 1990. The Bees Act states that beehives should be at least 30 meters from *“a property line separating the land on which the hives are placed or left from land occupied as a dwelling or used for a community center, public park or other place of public assembly or recreation”* (Section 19.1). The Bees Act also states that *“No person shall place hives or leave hives containing bees within 10 metres of a highway”* (Section 19.2).

There are no setback limitations stated in the Bees Act for property lines where the land neighbouring the land on which the beehives are located is vacant, agricultural, or otherwise not inhabited or in frequent or regular use by humans. Similarly, there is no setback limitation stated for roadways other than highways. In practice the setbacks outlined in the Bees Act are used as a dispute resolution mechanism if a complaint is made regarding the location of an apiary.

Purpose

From time-to-time municipalities may revise existing bylaws or develop new bylaws to complement the Ontario Bees Act. This position statement outlines some considerations that municipal planners may consider when developing or revising bylaws related to honey bees and beekeeping with a particular focus on considerations related to the distance between beehives and a property line.

Introduction

The Bees Act allows for beekeeping on properties regardless of their land use zone classification. There is no restriction on the number of hives that can be placed on a property. The setback requirements outlined in the Bees Act are typically only applied as a dispute resolution mechanism. In practice this means that a beekeeper keeping bees near a property line, regardless of the size or zoning of the property, is strongly incentivized to do so respectfully and maintain positive relationships with their neighbours.

Even on large properties beekeepers may choose to locate apiaries near property lines for a variety of reasons. Some examples of why a beekeeper may choose to locate hives near a property line even on a large property include access considerations, natural features that protect the apiary from winter wind, or preferences of the landowner. There are steps that beekeepers can take to minimize disturbance of neighbours and maintain positive relationships with neighbours when bees are located near property lines. These include keeping hive numbers reasonable on smaller lot sizes, facing hive entrances away from the nearest property

line, and or facing the entrance towards a hedge or fence so that bees are forced to fly up and over the hedge or fence to reduce interaction with neighbours. Many beekeepers also proactively engage with their neighbours to familiarize them with bees before bringing hives onto a property.

If a beekeeper is not compliant with the setback rules and a complaint is made under the Bees Act then an OMAFA Apiary Inspector will typically visit the beekeeper to review the complaint and the beekeeper will typically be asked to relocate their apiary if it is not in compliance with the setbacks outlined in the Bees Act. This mechanism has been working reasonably well since the Bees Act was established in 1990.

OBA Position Statement

The OBA acknowledges and appreciates the support that municipalities are providing to beekeepers. The goal of facilitating beekeeping where it might currently be restricted is admirable and welcomed. It is in beekeepers' interest that all beekeepers continue to maintain strong and positive relationships with their neighbours. To help encourage the removal of barriers to beekeeping while ensuring that beekeepers continue to be proactive in their relationships with their neighbours and their community the OBA suggests the following be considered during bylaw development:

1. Beekeeping should be allowed on any type of property regardless of zoning.
2. The number of hives on a property should not be restricted regardless of size or zoning.
3. A dispute resolution mechanism will help to ensure that all beekeepers continue to proactively engage with their neighbours and their community.
4. Property line setback guidelines have been an effective dispute resolution mechanism.
5. Setbacks should be explicitly described as dispute resolution mechanisms to avoid inadvertent misinterpretation by new bylaw officers.
6. If a complaint is made, then the setback between the hive location and the complainant's property line should be the only setback considered in a dispute resolution process.
7. Bylaw limitations on beekeeping should not be more restrictive than the Bees Act.
8. It is important that all beekeepers in Ontario [register](#) with the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture Food and Agribusiness (OMAFRA). If a complaint is made against a beekeeper who is not registered with OMAFA then additional compliance issues under the Bees Act may be raised.
9. Consultation with the OBA during the development of bylaws would be welcomed.

Conclusion

The OBA feels that the Bees Act helps to foster positive relationships between beekeepers and the communities they serve. The existing setback rules have been an adequate mechanism to resolve disputes between neighbours. The OBA is available for consultation if municipalities are considering bylaws that could affect the beekeeping community in Ontario. The OBA

appreciates municipal efforts to facilitate and encourage beekeeping. The OBA would encourage municipalities that are considering bylaws affecting bees to do so in a manner that compliments the Bees Act and does not create a perceived limit on hive numbers particularly on larger properties that are often zoned agricultural.

About the OBA

The Ontario Beekeepers' Association (OBA) is one of Canada's oldest agricultural organizations. It was founded in 1881 to represent the interests of Ontario beekeepers. Beekeeping in Ontario is a diverse industry and Ontario is home to many small-scale beekeepers with one or a handful of hives. Ontario also has a vibrant commercial beekeeping sector with beekeepers managing hundreds to thousands of hives. Beekeepers in Ontario produce honey, provide paid pollination services, harvest hive products, or breed and sell local honey bee stock. Each of these business models face unique challenges and opportunities and is why the OBA's membership has grown steadily over the last 10 years to more than 1,400 members.

Canada ranks number 11 in the world for production of honey, however, we also are the 17th largest importers and honey in the world. Within Canada, Ontario has ¼ of Canada's beekeepers, at approximately 3,900, and a little bit over 10% of the country's bee colonies, at approximately 100,000 hives, while Ontario annually produces 10% of Canada's honey valued at almost \$40 million.

In the 2023 Statistical Overview of the Canadian Honey and Bee industry prepared by Agriculture and Agrifoods Canada, it was estimated that the total annual economic contribution of honey bee pollination through direct additional harvest value was approximately \$7 billion. In Ontario, the value added by Ontario's beekeepers through their honey bee pollination services is approximately \$900 million annually, accounting for a little over 13% of all sales from agricultural crops grown in Ontario. Thirty-two of the most economically important crops are pollinated by bees in Ontario. As they say, "If you've eaten today, thank a farmer", and the OBA would like to add, "If you've eaten today, thank a farmer and their beekeeper".