

Aurora Heights P.S. community to get safer walk to school

By Brock Weir

Students and parents trekking on foot to Aurora Heights Public School will soon find the morning commute little bit safer after Council performed a u-turn on traffic control measures in the area.

Councillors are set to ratify an about-face to install a three-way stop sign at the intersection of Tecumseh Drive and the north leg of Kitimat Crescent, a measure that has been long-called for by the school's parent council.

Council also called for the installation of a further sidewalk in the area be made a priority when drafting the 2017 Budget.

Aurora Council put the plan on the backburner this past winter following a delegation from area resident James Hoyes who called for further community consultation on the measures, but Aurora Heights parent Eden Cantkier gave lawmakers cause for a second look.

"We are very concerned for our children's safety," said Ms. Cantkier. "The traffic hazards out front of our school place our children at high risk for serious injury every day. There is no stop sign, no crossing guard to ensure our children can cross the street safely. Careless driving is observed in abundance. Cars are speeding down the street and people are making illegal u-turns without looking or slowing down to consider who else is walking or driving around them.

"Aurora Heights has been identified as having one of the worst traffic conditions in the Region. Traffic studies have been completed. However, the issue has been brought to Town Council and other Town officials, studies have been completed, but the issue remains unresolved."

The threat to the safety of area kids is an "ever-present" concern, she added, citing a fatal accident outside of the school several years ago which prompted the school to move its pickup and drop off areas to the rear of the school. However, following the closure of Wells Street Public School, the Aurora Heights community swelled and the pick-up and drop-off area had to be configured back.

"The school has done their best by providing staff to support the pick-up and drop-off activity, however this does not change the safety of the traffic conditions or put any safety measures in place to support our children," said Ms. Cantkier. "There needs to be appropriate safety measures to control traffic in a school zone and we wish to obtain approvals for a stop sign to be installed and for a crossing guard to be assigned.

"We can put measures in place to support our children who have to do that every day. [Crossing the street] is not an option. They're not playing; they are going to school and there should be the necessary action in order to make sure that is the case."

In the end, Ms. Cantkier got more than she asked for as Council went a step further to earmark the new sidewalk as a priority.

Speaking to her delegation, Councillor Paul Pirri said he was in favour of the measures the last time this was brought before Council and remained so.

Councillor John Abel added: "We all want our children to be safe and we encourage walking to school."

"It makes no sense to me to have the safety guards [in place] and put their children on the road. We have a master plan for sidewalks and I am certain we prioritize school areas."

Should the sidewalk be approved during this fall's budget process, it could be in place as early as the spring of 2017, noted Ilmar Simanovskis, Aurora's Director of Infrastructure.

While the plan still needs to be formally approved by Council this week, some expressed a degree of frustration in the process to get

to an approval stage, although others were quick to voice their support the first time around.

?In [Mr. Hoyes'] defence, I don't think he has a total issue with a stop sign necessarily, but the main issue is having local residents involved in the communication and participation of what happens at that intersection,? said Councillor Harold Kim. ?[That is] critical to the success because a lot of times neighbours are the eyes and ears and they contribute to a safe environment.?