

Wildlife Crossing areas marked for St. John's, Henderson

By Brock Weir

Why did the turtle
cross the road?

Well, for some poor
creatures, getting to the other side of a busy road is more of a dream than an
achievement.

New illuminated road
signs, however, are hoped to give turtles and other critters more of a fighting
chance to make it across St. John's Sideroad and Henderson Drive in the weeks
ahead.

This spring,
solar-powered illuminated wildlife crossing signs will be installed near
wetlands on these busy thoroughfares following concerns from residents in the
Henderson area.

Council approved
\$7,000 for the installation of four signs and some turtle nesting boxes ? two
signs in each neighbourhood ? as part of the 2019 Budget.

It was hoped these
signs and nesting boxes would be in place by the time nesting season rolls
around at the end of this month, but budget constraints have put the nesting
boxes in question.

?We have a budget of
\$7,000. The signs have already taken us over that,? said Al Downey, Aurora's
Director of Operations, at last week's Council meeting.

Mr. Downey was
responding to questions from Councillor Wendy Gaertner on the status of the
signs and nesting boxes.

During the budget
process, Councillors Gaertner and Sandra Humfries were the most vocal
proponents of installing nesting boxes and wildlife crossing signs in these
particular areas, citing concerns they had received from neighbours and the
efforts residents had gone to either help the turtles cross the road from
adjacent ponds and wetlands, or care for turtles that had been injured in the
process.

?Every year, we have
an issue with wildlife crossing over certain roads,?
Councillor Gaertner told her colleagues at the March 18 Budget Meeting, paying

particular attention to Henderson and St. John's. ?It concerns residents and last year I drove Mr. Downey crazy [about signs] but I think we need to put something in the budget to try and address this problem. [Acting Parks Manager] Jim Tree said maybe we could hire a consultant and figure out the best way to do this, but I think [at this point on Henderson at least] I would like to is a placeholder in the budget. It won't be a lot of money?and it would give Mr. Downey and the residents and Council some flexibility to deal with this.?

This was, added
Councillor Humfries, an ?immediate concern? with the arrival of spring and animals starting the mating game.

?We could do something this year to protect wildlife,? she said. ?I think we're kind of running out of time. With this motion, I think for next year for sure, we'll need to get a study done and some real expertise, but this year we're going to miss an opportunity to protect this wildlife. It is short-term and long-term.?

Councillor Harold
Kim agreed with their efforts, noting residents had, just a few months previously, made a number of recommendations to address the problem that seemed cost-effective.

Fast forward, and
the four signs have already gone \$1,000 over the allotted budget.

?We would like to post [these signs] as soon as possible,? said Mr. Downey last week. ?I have contacted the [Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority] and they are able to put in turtle nesting areas. However, we are over-budget at this point and we'll have to give some consideration on that. We've directed staff to install silt fencing along Henderson to help with the turtles crossing.

?We will be meeting with the Conservation Authority to find out whether or not this is something?they have the capabilities of doing it, [and] whether or not we can look at doing that in this budget, or whether we look at this as an overall plan when we do road reconstruction at Henderson.?