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New sidewalk could make things easier for shoppers

By Brock Weir

Pedestrians could soon have an easier way to access shopping and services on Earl Stewart Drive.

Council is set to approve a new sidewalk project for the east side of Earl Stewart Drive which would provide shoppers on foot with better access to local businesses, and destinations such as Superstore, an LCBO and The Beer Store.

A sidewalk is currently on the west side of the street, allowing foot traffic from the residential neighbourhood at the northwest corner of St. John's Sideroad and Bayview Avenue near St. Andrew's Valley Golf Course, but Aurora's Accessibility Advisor recommended a sidewalk on the east side from St. John's to Pedersen would be in order.

If approved, the project comes with a nearly $116,000 price tag.

?The need for the proposed sidewalk on the east side of Earl Stewart Drive?was identified resulting from concerns from residents attempting to access the Superstore from St. John's Sideroad,? said Ilmar Simanovskis, Aurora's Director of Infrastructure, in a report to Council. ?The proposed sidewalk will provide safe pedestrian access to the Superstore and the surrounding businesses that complies with the requirements of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act.?

The proposal came forward for Council approval at the end of June, but Councillors voted to hold off on a decision until July 16 pending further information after some Councillors objected to the plan.

?I recognize that the east side of Earl Stewart Drive is dangerous,? said Councillor Chris Ballard, noting two major entrances to Superstore and the surrounding area. ?It is a crazy place to try and walk and ride a bike. If you have a mobility challenge, it would be even more difficult. However, there is a sidewalk all the way down the west side, so I don't know why we wouldn't simply have one or two places between St. John's and Pedersen and put one or two crosswalks to allow people coming from St. John's to travel along an already existing sidewalk and not cross over these driveways.?
While Councillors ultimately supported deferring the project pending further information because it wasn't necessarily urgent, others, however, wanted to see more immediate action on the site.

?We have heard stories last year of individuals trying to cross the street with kids, like a lot of people on the north side [of St. John's] have, and they aren't able to get to the Superstore,? said Councillor Paul Pirri of the intersection. ?This isn't the first time we have seen a report or have emails on the same subject, so really this is a safety issue.?

Going ahead was also supported by Councillors Evelyn Buck and John Abel. Both highlighted the safety issues in the area and their stance was, ?just get on with it.'

?It is a high traffic area,? said Councillor John Abel. ?Just do the sidewalk that has been identified. I don't see any need to defer it.? In a further report before Councillors this week, Mr. Simanovskis said crosswalks over from the sidewalks already installed on the west side would be impossible unless at an intersection.

?Mid-block crossing can only be provided at intersections in conjunction with intersection pedestrian signals or stop signs where motorists need to come to a complete stop before pedestrians safely cross the road,? he said. ?Considering the distance from intersection to intersection, providing any other type of pedestrian crossing outside of these areas would not provide any more convenience or safety compared to completion of the sidewalk along the east side.?