Aurora Heights area sidewalks move forward

New sidewalks intended to help increase pedestrian safety around Aurora Heights Public School have received the formal thumbs-up from Council.

After months of debate, local lawmakers formally approved a sidewalk for Kitimat Crescent, one which will be installed directly adjacent to the curb on the north and west side of the street. The planned location of the sidewalk, according to Town Staff, is to ?preserve as much driveway capacity as possible? in the area.

Maintaining driveway capacity was one of the many sticking points residents opposed to the proposal brought to Council's attention over the past year. Their concerns sparked no shortage of alternative ideas to increase pedestrian safety, including a proposal to temporarily turn Kitimat into a one-way street until layby parking for the nearby school could be completed under a wider raft of safety measures. But safety ultimately won the day.

The sidewalk project is budgeted at $192,700, an increase from the previous $100,000 originally earmarked at budget-time, but more than $50,000 of this is for ?optional extra work? including the removal of catch basins and infrastructure repairs, if deemed necessary over the course of the construction.

For crossing guard Suzanne Lytle, the cost to get the job done was a small price to pay to increase children's safety.

?Each September, I look forward to seeing my little friends after summer break. I also look forward to making new friends. Each year, I find at least half of the children who are driven to school and park on Kitimat are in kindergarten. Some are as young as three when they start,? said Ms. Lytle in a written delegation to Council. ?Parents and carers drive the children for all different reasons. Many of them are working parents, primary parents, parents who have children in multiple schools, new moms with little ones and grandparents. They are all good people; they are just trying to go about their day and get their kids to and from school safely. They deserve a safe route to school, they deserve to be off the road.

?Families parking along Kitimat is not exclusive to just the morning and afternoon rush. Parents pick up and drop off at all different times throughout the day due to appointments and whatever. Some children go home each day for lunch. There are parent-teacher interviews, award assemblies, art nights, holiday celebrations, Welcome to Kindergarten, graduation and sports teams coming from other schools who park on Kitimat. There are many little feet travelling along Kitimat throughout the day, not just during the rush.

?I love my job and I love these kids. It would haunt me

forever if a child is ever hurt on my watch. I can't even imagine what it would do to the motorist. Children are compulsive, easily distracted, unpredictable and completely unaware of the dangers that are around them. It only takes a second to change a life forever. Restricting parking along the side of Kitimat or making Kitimat a one-way street is not going to eliminate all the dangers of having children walking on the road with cars travelling past them. The Police may be able to help control and enforce the laws of the road, bylaw may be able to control where people park, parents can try and control their impulsive children, but no one can control Mother Nature. Accidents happen.?

Council ultimately agreed, approving the project's budget unanimously.

?I know I have received quite a bit of communication over the last several weeks and have had a few people accuse me of trying to make residents happy and not doing what is right, which is a little disappointing, but I can take it. I have been a politician for a while now,? said Councillor Sandra Humfryes.

?What I have in my heart is the good of the community. I do believe the safety issues are still going to be there. The sidewalk may help, but it is not going to alleviate what we see there day to day. I do look forward to getting this moving forward, hopefully addressing the residents' driveways that are going to be compromised by this, but we will work through it, I am sure.?

By Brock Weir