

?Complete Streets? concept would make road a comfortable place for all users

By Brock Weir

All too often drivers, cyclists and pedestrians are caught in a battle for space and safety, but the concept of a ?complete street? where everyone has their own lane could alleviate some of those problems.

Aurora is investigating the feasibility of implementing a ?Complete Streets? policy as part of upcoming revisions to the Town's official plan.

Council unanimously approved a motion from Councillor Tom Mrakas last week calling for the ?Complete Streets? philosophy to be applied to all future road developments within Aurora and seeing where existing ? and appropriate ? streets can be redeveloped to meet the needs of pedestrians, cyclists, and persons with disabilities.?

?Complete Streets,? said Councillor Mrakas, ?ensures that transportation planners and engineers consistently design and operate the entire street network for all road users, not only motorists,? and would be a cost-effective option in the long-run.

?I believe, as we have always talked about moving towards more pedestrian-friendly streets in our Town [this] is a way to make it official, to integrate it within our official plan,? said Councillor Mrakas, speaking to his motion at last week's Council meeting, noting the City of Ottawa has set a standard, transforming one of their main thoroughfares into a roadway compatible for motorists, cyclists and pedestrians alike. ?As we move to do our Official Plan update, we can ask staff to officially incorporate that into that update.

?It is cost-effective [for future roads] because you look at doing it all at once instead of doing it piecemeal. Right now we are looking at doing a cycling master plan and developing that. When you do that, you turn around and five years later, you say we want to add this to the street. It is going to cost more doing it in that piecemeal fashion instead of setting forth a policy that looks at developing this all at once and, if we can, put it in all at once.?

Putting it into the Official Plan, he said, makes this a guideline going forward and, within the Plan, there would be some flexibility.

While Councillor Wendy Gaertner noted that the Official Plan is Aurora's ?main planning tool and not just a wish list,? she said including the Complete Streets concept into its redraft was a ?fantastic idea,? but one she hoped would not prove costly.

Another vocal supporter was Councillor Sandra Humfries who said a complete inventory of Aurora's existing streets, future thoroughfares, and possible opportunities should be compiled.

?It would be like a package of what every street should look like or be,? she said. ?It would be the same standards and there is a design approach. I love that it includes walkability and other means of transportation other than cars. I am looking forward to the report back and seeing how our approach is going to be and how we can put that into effect.?

Mayor Geoff Dawe, who has previously pushed for a re-think in traffic patterns on Yonge Street, including reducing the current four-lane road in the historic section to one lane of traffic each way with the balance dedicated to on-street parking, said Ottawa's venture was a ?fascinating one? and led to a reduction in traffic.

?I think there are great opportunities to pick up efficiencies in how our streets work,? he said. ?I am still hopeful we'll see some action on Yonge Street at some point.?

Councillor Harold Kim, on the other hand, sought assurances from Town Staff, that going down this particular path would not adversely impact traffic around Aurora.

?There is an opportunity to further investigate Complete Streets,? said Marco Ramunno, Aurora's Director of Planning. ?I will provide the framework for future implementation, but Council would still need to review and approve any construction program or project to implement a given Complete Street. Council will still have full opportunity to review the implementation plan.?

Costs for Complete Streets that are not already finished would be borne by the developer, he added.

?We wouldn't be able to turn the whole town into one complete street,? concluded Councillor Mrakas. ?It is just not viable and would never happen; it would be dependent on what areas, how it would work, and staff coming with their own expertise to say these are areas where we can implement the Complete Streets policy.?