

Leslie Street underpass costs continue to rise

By Brock Weir

This year, the Region of York is set to begin a significant reconstruction of Leslie Street through Aurora, but the costs of two pedestrian underpasses set to be built between the Region and the Town continues to rise.

Council approved going 50-50 on the costs of two pedestrian underpasses for Leslie between St. John's Sideroad and Wellington Street East last fall, setting a budget of \$753,624, back in November of 2015.

But, that was then.

As debate continued over the future of two additional underpasses since proposed, and since nixed, the price has continued to go up on the two approved underpasses, with the cost for Aurora's share now nearly \$902,000.

The Regional Municipality of York Transportation Services Department has advised that their tender process for the reconstruction of Leslie Street has been completed, said Aurora's Parks Manager, Jim Tree, in a report before Councillors this week. The actual bid prices have resulted in a significant increase in the cost of the underpasses such that the Town of Aurora share has increased by an additional \$148,336. This brings the Aurora 50 per cent share of the two underpasses to a total of \$901,960, which exceeds the current approved budget of \$753,624.

The Regional Municipality of York has not offered any additional information or explanation for this increase other than to indicate that the project prices are simply a reflection of the current market prices based on the scope of work specified in the tender documents.

Council members could move to press the Region for this additional information this week, similar to how they questioned project increases for the two additional underpasses this past fall.

Previous discussions had Council members questioning the usefulness of the underpass project, but supporters argue they will prove vital connections between the communities now being built on the west side of Leslie Street towards the burgeoning business park developments set to transform the east side of the street.

The Region of York initially tasked Aurora with committing to its half of the funding by the end of 2016, but the two bodies have since agreed to a new deadline of March 1. Should a final decision not be reached by the First of March, the project will not continue, Mr. Tree advises.

They have the option of not proceeding with the underpasses but lawmakers are advised this would not be in keeping with the Trails Master Plan Policy where grade separated crossings of major arterial highways are the preferred method of crossing.

Should the underpasses be ultimately built, there could be more work for Aurora to do.

The underpasses have been designed and tendered without the inclusion of illumination components or other security measures as [The Region] has taken the position that these additions would not be eligible for Regional funding assistance, says Mr. Tree. In addition, access to the underpasses from the road surface will not be included in the underpass construction works as this is also viewed by the Region to be outside of the shared cost.

In view of this, and in the event that illumination and road access to the underpasses is desired by the Town, these features will need to be considered at a future date. It is also expected that the underpasses will not be opened until completion of the associated trails-related work estimated to be completed within the next four to five years. Should it be determined that illumination and roadside access to the underpasses is required, staff will provide Council with further information and cost implications in this regard in future reports and capital budget submissions.