

New crosswalk gets tentative green light ahead of Machell and Irwin development

A new stop sign and crosswalk could soon be in place at the intersection of Machell Avenue and Irwin Avenue pending a Council decision this week.

The move, which goes against recommendations from municipal staff, was tentatively approved by Aurora Council at the Committee level on October 19.

A potential traffic control measure in the area was first floated by Councillor Harold Kim earlier this year through a motion in which he outlined his concerns that the area was being used by drivers from outside the immediate neighbourhood as a way to bypass the busy Yonge and Wellington intersection.

The idea gained further traction at a Public Planning meeting earlier this month where area residents expressed concerns over the impact a proposed condo development for the southwest corner of Irwin and Yonge might have on local traffic.

But going into last week's Committee meeting, however, Council members faced a report from staff saying the current traffic volumes at Machell and Irwin don't meet the Town's criteria for a "controlled intersection."

"You have to keep in mind that even though traffic warrants criteria were not met, we're still in a COVID situation where some of the traffic is still muted," said Councillor Kim in response to the recommendation. "I see no reason why we can't go against the staff recommendation and be proactive in this case. Right now, the three-way intersection is not like other intersections; it is not a large thoroughfare, but it is quickly becoming one. I think the all-way stop sign [and] cross walk delivers traffic management, [and] helps the livability of residents on the street."

From the perspective of Councillor Wendy Gaertner, this was not the "only solution" for traffic issues in the area, but it is worth a shot.

"The traffic cutting through is also an issue and I would like to try and find a way to limit that or completely stop that," she said. "I am not sure about the crosswalk though. I would like to put the stop sign in place and then see if we need a crosswalk there."

"But I think we need to err on the side of caution and do a stop there."

Councillor Michael Thompson offered a similar viewpoint to that of Councillor Harold Kim, stating that the evaluation of whether or not the area met traffic warrants was incomplete. The report, he noted, refers to traffic "at this time" and "under the existing conditions" but the current state of traffic is likely to shift sooner rather than later.

"I am cognizant of the fact Council has before it a significant planning application for that corner that would significantly impact the warrants and the data that is in this report," he said. "I like the opportunity to be proactive rather than reactive. We're hearing from residents today that there is a situation and yes?in the report it doesn't meet the warrants, but I don't want to get into a situation where we're dealing with this well after the fact and the situation [is compounded]."

"When I look at this report and I think about the planning application, while it ultimately may still change in certain aspects of it, given the Centro building across the street, I think there will be something on that corner?.[and] it is going to meet or exceed those warrants. I am comfortable moving ahead with the amendment and supporting because I get that today it doesn't meet the warrants, but I think it will."

But this uncertainty over the development was cause enough to give Councillor Rachel Gilliland pause.

"The planning application is not finalized," she said. "For all I know, they could pull it and they won't build anything. I really don't

know what it is going to look like when it is built, the traffic, and maybe a stop sign isn't going to solve the problem. Maybe it will be calming measures like speed humps instead.

?I understand we want to be proactive, but we don't know what the finalized planning application is going to be like. It was quite clear to the developers that traffic analysis of the area was incomplete and needed to have some refinements?we weren't sure what the parking was going to be, so I think it is very preliminary to be installing a stop sign at this point because it just might not be the right solution.?

On a similar token, Councillor John Gallo was unconvinced and voted against the motion ? albeit for a different reason.

Citing Council's decision last year to install a stop sign on John West Way at Amberhill, Councillor Gallo says he regularly sees vehicles backed up at the intersection and questions if there have been any studies out there on the carbon footprint attached to vehicles waiting at such stop signs.

?It is significant when we keep introducing these things when the merits aren't there,? he said. ?Even if we think it is justified, I don't think it is a complete picture. As a Town, we keep promoting we're being conscious of our carbon footprint and we're doing so much to be able to deal with environmental issues [and] to me this is a big one.

?I am happy to monitor it and if here comes a point where it is justified, then obviously we move forward with it.?

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter