

Aurora gives green light to Regional partnership on trail underpasses

By Brock Weir

Pedestrian underpasses beneath Leslie Street could soon be in the works following Council approval last month.

Councillors signed off on a \$475,000 plan to explore a 50-50 partnership with the Region of York to create the two trail underpasses near St. John's Sideroad when the Region reconstructs Leslie Street in 2015.

The potential partnership on the two digs were floated at Council earlier this summer and following deferral were considered and approved at Town Hall on August 13. When Council previously tackled the underpasses, most were in favour of partnering on something that would allow users of the Town's trails network to travel without having to grapple with traffic and crosswalks on the street level, but others questioned whether these underpasses, with development still set to take place in the area, would ultimately be used to their full potential.

"My concern at that time, which is, to some degree, still a concern, is I want to make sure that if we build those underpasses that they are going to connect with the trails," said Councillor Michael Thompson. "In both cases, east of the proposed underpasses, has business park dedications on it, so the reality is that we very much might have street trails on either one of these underpasses as it winds through business parks.

"I don't want to see us have to spend money and not be able to secure the land and the trails that connect and interconnect. The challenge is if you are going to do it, the time is now. The Region is willing to put the funding in and it makes sense because of the road reconstruction and you can argue it will never be cheaper to do it."

While supportive of the underpasses, the same concerns were given by Councillors John Abel and John Gallo. Councillor Abel, for instance, said with the potential Regional partnership on the horizon, along with extensive development in the 2C lands surrounding these two underpasses, they will be a wise investment in the future.

"It will be populated and well-used," said Councillor Abel of the area. "I am very much in favour of those two locations and the Region feels the same way. When we first talked about this two years ago the proposal was a million dollars per and the Region was basically saying they weren't going to look at it and if we wanted to do it, we could go ahead. Now we're looking at \$200,000 and \$270,000 and that to me is an opportunity and I think it is going to be a good investment in our trails system going forward."

Councillor Gallo said while he believes previous estimates from the Region on how much it would take to build these underpasses were "inflated", he thanked the Aurora Trails Committee and, in particular, advocate Klaus Wehrenberg, for getting the numbers down to something more reasonable.

"We're down to a reasonable price tag for something I believe will be beneficial," he said. "It is a struggle whether they are going to go into nothing. We didn't have that foresight down at the end of the street at the Wellington and John West Way underpass which really should have gone in. I don't know the rationale of why it didn't and I don't want to repeat that."