

Brookland reconstruction resulted in hit to businesses, environment: Councillors

By Brock Weir

The reconstruction of Brookland Avenue has been branded as a 'horror story' by one Councillor, but the Town should step up to make a gesture to local businesses and give a helping hand to environmental damage, according to Councillors.

More concerns with the lingering impact of the controversial road reconstruction project on Brookland Avenue were aired around the Council table this week, this time with local lawmakers focused on the negative impacts the prolonged construction had on local business, as well as the negative impacts it had on the local environment.

'There was a lot of inconvenience caused to local residents and businesses,' said Councillor Wendy Gaertner, reiterating some of the issues she raised at the previous week's General Committee meeting.

She asked whether or not it would be appropriate to put something out through the Town's various communications channels that they 'regret the inconvenience' the construction had on local shops.

At the time of the construction, Aurora encouraged patrons to visit local businesses through those same channels, said Stephanie Mackenzie-Smith, Manager of Corporate Communications for the Town of Aurora, letting patrons know that the entrances to the local plaza and LCBO were not impacted by the road construction.

Nevertheless, Councillor Gaertner said more should be done.

'I would like to acknowledge the businesses we might have effected,' she said.

These concerns were shared by Councillor John Abel, but his issues were more focused on the environmental damage wrought by the construction, including the 'removal of vegetation along culverts' and how that might have impacted area run-off.

'We do try our best to mitigate any removal of vegetation, but I believe [the Director] explained that they had to address the slope and, therefore, it required the removal of vegetation,' said Councillor Abel. 'There are a lot of things we could learn from this going forward, and not all projects are of the same scope and easy. This is, in my two terms, one that is at the extreme of how things cannot add up and it just seems to accumulate in a long project that we don't normally see.'

'I appreciate some of the communication and management comments that were gleaned from this situation and hopefully weather cooperates, and challenges on culverts are understood and we're able to meet the challenges of dealing with it.'

Councillor Gaertner, on the other hand, was less conciliatory about the matter.

'We need to bring this down to a level of reality for everybody,' she continued. 'What we actually did was destroy habitat of squirrels and skunks, and we took down trees with hollows that were resting places. But those places to nest and live are becoming more and more rare. I don't think that this had to happen, but we are going forward.'

'To bring it down even to a closer level, a friend of mine lives on the fourth or fifth floor of that apartment building and she actually had a squirrel make a nest in the bag of earth that she left out over the winter because there was no other place. That is a pretty dire consequence to have a squirrel climb up to a four or fifth floor balcony, find a bag of earth and make a nest. Going forward, we really do need to take more care with our natural environment.'

According to Marco Ramunno, Aurora's Director of Planning, design drawings for the Brookland project identified, through an arbourist's report, a number of trees and plots of vegetation that had to be removed as part of the culvert placement. There is, he stressed, a replanting program in place and that replanting will take place sometime this spring or in the early summer.

At the end of the day, however, Councillor Tom Mrakas said the primary consideration has to be the business impact.

'We have talked about this one a lot and there has been a lot of issues, but the thing that we need to be mindful of, and what I think is most important to us, is the disruption to our businesses and to our residents,' said Councillor Mrakas. 'I think that is what we have asked our staff to look at moving forward and to be proactive and minimize that disruption. I think our CAO has heard us loud and clear and I think when we looked at this specific project there [were] some communications problems between departments and we have been assured that has been taken care of.'

'Moving forward, we're going to make sure that doesn't happen. I think there are a lot of things that have been identified that we could have been proactive, regardless of the weather. We all now the weather is unpredictable and it can cause delays, but if we put the proper measures in place, I think we can do a better job to minimize that disruption to our residents and businesses.'