

Changes proposed after ?horror story? on Brookland

By Brock Weir

Long delayed and bigger-than-expected reconstruction works on Brookland Avenue last year left business owners and residents alike angry with how things went down. From Councillor Wendy Gaertner's perspective, it was nothing short of a ?horror story? for all concerned. Now, changes are being proposed to ensure these situations don't pop up again.

This week, Council will consider a number of changes to how the Town approaches road reconstruction projects, including a more stringent procurement process for contractors, full traffic management plans, and provision for damages to be paid by the contractor. Residents last year did not hesitate to express their frustration with reconstruction of Brookland, but the matter came to a head at the Council table after the owners of the nearby Yonge Street Winery cited financial losses resulting from consumers not being able to access their store.

?The main concerns from the residents in the Brookland Avenue area included the project duration, traffic and access matters, business disruption with resultant business loss, the adequacy of the contractor's actions, schedule delays and overall contractor performance,? said Anca Mihail, Manager of Engineering and Capital Delivery for the Town of Aurora, in her report to Council.

?The scheduling delays were mostly due to the very wet summer of 2017, with a very high number of rain days (28 in total) that impacted and delayed the culvert replacement work. The replacement of the [sanitary sewer, the storm sewer and watermain], as well as the road work, could not start until the two culverts were replaced. The schedule delays intensified the disruption to both residents and business owners and there were complaints regarding noise, dust, mud on the street, storefront disruption, difficult pedestrian traffic access, as well as difficult access into the commercial plaza. Also, the size of the required work zone and the narrow right-of-way of Brookland Avenue intensified the construction disruption to residents and the general public.?

One way to right any future wrongs, she said, is to require all potential contractors to issue a pre-qualification, which would allow for the evaluation of all contractors based on specific criteria as well as their expertise to perform the work, including capacity requirements, before they can even submit a bid to take on the project.

?Pre-qualifying criteria are project-specific to ensure an alignment between the performance requirements of the project with the capabilities, capacity and experience of the contractors bidding the job in order to confidently secure compliant contractors,? she said. ?Additional criteria can be considered on a project-specific basis.?

For significant projects, a Traffic Management Plan will, pending Council's approval this week, be required. Currently, traffic control plans are the norm for outlining construction work zones and proper procedures and appropriate signage for closing traffic lanes during the construction projects.

?For projects where the traffic impact of a construction project is considered to be significant and extending beyond the limits of the work zone, a more comprehensive site and area specific Traffic Management Plan can be developed by the contractor prior to the start of construction,? said Ms. Mihail. ?The ultimate objective of the Traffic Management Plan is to ensure that road safety is maintained for the public and construction workers.?

Throughout the process, improved communication is recommended both within Town Hall and with members of the public, including the creation of a Road Reconstruction page on the Town's website and regular direct communications to area businesses and residents.

The recommendations in the report were received positively by Council members at last week's General Committee meeting, but some thought these measures could go further.

?I was involved in this project when it didn't start on time, from the beginning of July, all the way through to the fall,? said Councillor Gaertner. ?This project was a horror story and my opinion is when we're looking at ways to improve how we handle these kinds of projects there has to be some kind of Town oversight. I don't know if Town oversight was lacking in this case, but I think it is a very important component.?

Mayor Geoff Dawe suggested the report be sent back to Town Staff to address Councillor Gaertner's concerns, but withdrew his motion to do just that in favour of an additional memo expected before this week's Council meeting.

Councillor John Abel also noted concerns, primarily with the damage done during the project.

?The scope of this work is controversial and well-known, but what I really want to point out, in addition to a lot of the activity? is the devastation of a lot of the plant life and the big trees and how it impacts the ability to retain the water that pours into that part of Tannery Creek that goes downstream,? he said.

In response, Marco Ramunno, Aurora's Director of Planning, said a number of trees had to be removed because of the slopes on the

site and efforts to stabilize the land. A new planting program is planned to replace some of the lost vegetation over this spring and summer, he said, but this did not go far enough in the Councillor's view.

?These were very big, mature trees and these little plants we're putting in will take years, decades to bring back the protection and value those trees have collectively,? he said. ?It was a canopy and now the runoff is going to be significantly different than what [it was] normally.?