

## Council looks for alternatives to Aurora Heights Public School?area sidewalk

**By Brock Weir**

Would the Aurora Community Centre parking lot be a safer place to drop off Aurora Heights students while improving traffic and parking congestion in the streets surrounding the school?

That is just one of the questions Council is considering as they look for alternatives to a proposed new sidewalk on Kitimat Crescent.

Following last week's General Committee meeting, Council is poised to vote down a recommendation for a new sidewalk on Kitimat, following opposition from the community.

Money for the sidewalk -- \$100,000 ? was allotted in the 2018 Budget by the previous Council, citing improving the walkability of school routes, but neighbours say this sidewalk proposal misses the mark.

?Kitimat Crescent was reconstructed in 2001 and at that time the Town did not have a sidewalk installation policy,? said Anca Mihail, Manager of Engineering and Capital Delivery for the Town, in her report to Council. ?The residents were surveyed on the construction of a sidewalk on the street and the majority of them opposed the installation of a sidewalk. As a result, Kitimat was reconstructed without a sidewalk.

?The sidewalk construction on Kitimat Crescent was proposed by Council in 2016 as a result of the School Travel Planning Program implemented for Aurora Heights Public School, which sets out mechanisms to allow for student pedestrian priority, outside of Kitimat Crescent road construction. There is enough room to accommodate a sidewalk on both sides of the street, however staff have proposed the sidewalk construction on the north and west part of the street to minimize any impacts to existing vegetation and utilities.?

The Town hosted an open house on the proposed sidewalk last September, which was open to residents of all 41 homes on the street. 23 residents came out and two further residents sent in written comments, along with a petition signed by 38 of the 41 households opposing the plan, citing loss of parking, street trees, yard space and property values.

The only note of support came from the local crossing guard who serves the area, who said Kitimat was a popular place for parents to drop off their kids.

The community's viewpoint was represented at the Council podium last week by neighbour James Hoyes, who said it was a sidewalk to nowhere and had 'serious flaws' including challenges to users of wheelchairs, walkers and other devices as a sidewalk would slope towards the road.

Following Mr. Hoyes' delegation, Councillor Sandra Humfries shared her own experiences in the area.

She said she observed a number of challenges while on the ground and didn't see the Kitimat sidewalk improving the situation.

'All these parents are dropping their students on Tecumseh and in front of the school there is absolutely no stopping and no parking.' She said. 'They have four volunteers there asking parents to stop and rush the kids out and move the cars along so the kids are safe.'

Citing the newly constructed GO Transit parking lot on Industrial Parkway South, which has a set of stairs leading up to the transit station parking area, she questioned whether a similar path could be constructed between the school and the nearby Aurora Community Centre.

'I know it is a steep hill, but I would love if staff could look at engineering a path from the ACC back towards the school so the kids can be safely dropped off by their parents and walk back out,' she said. 'I believe that will eliminate all the parking concerns. This is the only way we can stop the stuff that happens, instead of investing in a sidewalk there. I just don't think that is the right thing to do now. The parents have come here time and time again about the safety issues.'

While some Councillors said they still had questions remaining over accessibility issues, investigating alternatives in the short term and, in the long term, reconsidering sidewalks on Kitimat when the street is due for reconstruction in 2032, won the day.

'It would make sense that if we're going to do it to do it in 2032,' said Councillor Harold Kim. 'I don't think a sidewalk is a solution just for the sake of meeting the policies. I think it is great to follow the ad-hoc rules, but it is also prudent to follow practicality. Spending \$100,000 on a sidewalk that is not going to be used on many occasions doesn't seem like a prudent course of action for me.'

Councillor Rachel Gilliland had a similar viewpoint on the sidewalk, adding, 'it may not solve all the issues we're trying to achieve here, which is the safety of the

children exiting the cars and going to school. I don't know 100 per cent the solution and I am not comfortable moving forward with that.?

Mayor Tom Mrakas was also in favour of investigating alternatives and reconsidering the matter in 2032.

?I suggest that we go with the alternative in our report, which is to wait until that reconstruction comes and we can talk about a sidewalk at that time,? he said.

Added Councillor John Gallo: ?Surely if the vast majority are not for it, there doesn't seem to be a rationale to do it, but I would be in favour of sending this back to staff to explore alternative routes to get the kids to school.?