

Designs move forward on pedestrian link between Town Park and Library Square

A proposed new sidewalk on the north side of Metcalfe Street intended to serve as a pedestrian link between Town Park and the Library Square redevelopment will move forward to the design stage following a Council decision last week.

Council approved moving forward with in-house designs for the proposed pedestrian link with the final decision on whether to move forward with the sidewalk hinging on the Town's 2022 Capital Budget.

As The Auroran reported last month, municipal staff recommended the sidewalk, which will go along the southern edge of the Trinity Anglican Church property and a private property on the northeast corner of Metcalfe and Wells Streets after a planned walkway through the Trinity parking lot through to Wells was rejected for numerous practical reasons.

The Metcalfe alternative was met with mixed reviews on Council's first sweep of the plan on March 23, citing concerns from the impacted private property owner that sidewalk construction may damage heritage trees on the corner.

These concerns spilled over into last week's Council meeting, but of particular focus was whether or not the sidewalk itself will provide a practical link between the two attractions.

"We already have that connection currently on the south side [of Metcalfe] and two on Mosley as well," said Councillor Rachel Gilliland who noted while she didn't object to the proposed sidewalk in and of itself, the timing was off.

She instead suggested this would be better considered closer to the road's planned reconstruction in 2027.

"In 2027, we're going to be revisiting this. I believe it might be something we can talk about in 2024 or 2025 with conversations ahead with staff as well. I just feel like it might make more sense to wait until that time to resurface and do a sidewalk on the same time. I feel we have sufficient connectivity with the sidewalks we have in place now to move people from one place being Library Square to Town Park sufficiently without feeling disconnected."

Councillor Sandra Humfries agreed that "some" connectivity is already in place, but said she wanted a report to come back from staff taking these points into consideration, as well as the potential environmental concerns that were raised the previous week.

"A report [will] come back with some of those considerations and perhaps provide that cost-effective approach," she said. "I would love to see, perhaps, a connectivity on the other north end. I know we have had some issues, I get it, but maybe this is something that can be creatively put together. This is not providing an approval whatsoever, but at least a report to come back and absolutely look at those options in consideration for budget."

A similar view was offered by Councillor Michael Thompson who said the motion before Council merely requested a report.

"We can all have this conversation when that report comes back to us on whether we think it is something we should move forward with or not," he said. "Right now, I am comfortable supporting the motion just to bring a report with all the information we need to make a well-informed decision."

To underscore this point, Councillor Wendy Gaertner said the word "proposed" should be included within the wording of the motion to remove all doubt. This was a move that was supported by Councillor Gilliland as well as Councillor John Gallo.

But while Councillor Gilliland supported the inclusion of the word "proposed," she was the lone dissenting voice when the amended motion came up for a final vote.

"We're faced with heritage trees and costs," she said. "There's a lot more work to do for staff. It is going to cost some money [for]"

the Town to get an arborist to come in and make an assessment. Again, I am just taking a lens of priority budgeting and trying to understand if this is something that is a 'need' right now for us to be having staff spend their time and designing a sidewalk right now and directing [to] say it will be installed with this budget.?

By Brock Weir Editor Local Journalism Initiative Reporter