

Improvements coming for pedestrians on Henderson Drive

Significant changes will be coming to improve pedestrian safety on Henderson Drive near Tamarac Trail and Lee Gate.

Council last week approved two new measures that are aimed to make things safer for individuals looking to cross at an existing pedestrian crossover in the area that nearby residents say has continually fallen short since its installation in 2018.

Staff recommended improving the situation by installing an overhead flashing crossover sign and trimming nearby vegetation. Council accepted these preliminary recommendations as an interim measure to improve safety; but lawmakers also went a step further, going against staff's recommendations and voting in favour of a signalized crossing, as well.

Staff said the traffic volumes weren't there to justify the signalized crossing and could result in unnecessary traffic delays, use of fuel and increased noise, but Council agreed that residents' safety was paramount.

"This type of crosswalk is a dangerous solution for a drive like Henderson," said resident Margaret Burns who shared her views in a delegation to Council on the existing situation. "One of the biggest problems is when cars have actually stopped and people are in the middle of crossing. Often, the second car thinks the first car is making a left-hand turn and moves to the right of the stopped car, drives through while the pedestrian is in the middle of crossing the road. This is so dangerous."

This is something Ms. Burns said she and her family have experienced while crossing the street with their granddaughter. A car driving west, she said, went around the car that had stopped for them and missed the four-year-old by no more than two feet.

"Although the Town has done a traffic survey, that survey is at least three years old," she continued. "I have lived in Aurora for the past 24 years and I believe that the traffic has increased tremendously over these years. I don't claim to be a traffic engineer; I am certainly not up on all the rules and regulations that are associated with the general infrastructure and planning of the Town. However, I do believe I am qualified to talk intelligently about safety, and from what I have experienced as a person living in this neighbourhood and seeing the reality on the ground, this crosswalk is not safe."

Council agreed that the crosswalk as it stands is not safe, but the right path forward on how to correct the situation was the subject of debate.

Speaking in favour of taking the extra measures above and beyond staff's recommendation, Councillor Sandra Humfries said a similar crossing further east on Henderson has proved effective.

"I have not ever had a complaint or worry about that area and I am just afraid we're going to spend this kind of money now (on Staff's recommendation) and have to go to the further measure to make sure we are providing the best safety possible," she said.

Councillor Wendy Gaertner had a similar viewpoint, noting that although the measures that could cost more than \$200,000 funded from reserves allocated for the repair and replacement of roads, came with a steep bill, it was necessary.

"The bottom line here is safety," she said. "That's a lot of money that we hadn't planned on spending, but I think that in this case and with the situation that we need to find that money."

Added Councillor Harold Kim: "Safety is paramount. Whether it be sidewalks or whether it be stop signs? I can't put a price on that. Liability is always an issue and I don't want to have to come back after a \$15k temporary fix and add more to the budget."

Until the new mechanisms can be installed, Councillor Gaertner floated the idea of a four-way stop at the intersection, but the idea failed to find traction around the table.

?I think there is a false sense of security (with a stop sign) on such a busy road that people might just inadvertently roll through on a road like [Henderson],? said Councillor Rachel Gilliland. ?I would feel comfortable with the improvements of the crosswalk [as presented] and it would take a while to get a proper push-button full-on light stop. We need to have some improvements now. Things may change between now and then and maybe it is something that we review to see if this has been an improvement or not, and then if we do require that extra push button light, we cross that bridge when we get there.?

Councillor John Gallo was also in favour of going ahead with staff's recommendation to see if there was any improvement before committing to the enhanced measures before them.

?The numbers are nowhere near to justify the lights,? he said, also citing staff's concerns on the potential increase in fuel consumption, pollution and noise, further delays might cause. ?To me, that is pretty extensive. My view is we should move forward with this next step? monitor it, see if it has been improved. Motorists need to be used to something that is new and take it from there. If that doesn't work, then I would agree to explore other options, including the other recommendations.?

That being said, however, Councillor Gallo questioned the position of some Council members that it was a matter of one or the other. If safety was indeed paramount, he argued that going forward with staff's recommendation first while the details of anything further were being hammered out, was the best way forward.

?If what I've heard safety is paramount, if we don't do something now and we leave what's there and we're so concerned about safety you're willing to wait eight months in the horrible condition it is right now doesn't make any sense to me whatsoever,? he contended. ?For \$15k, something could be done immediately. If we move towards the full intersection pedestrian signal, I think it would be a huge mistake not to address the apparent concerns that most of you have tonight. We would be ignoring that.?

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