

Lawn signs encourage drivers to slow down in school areas

By Brock Weir

Federal election signs have been dotting Aurora's landscape for the past two months, but now that the election is over, Aurora hopes new lawn signs will soon take their place; that is lawn signs urging drivers to be aware of their speeds in school zones.

Aurora continues to be a Region-wide leader in school traffic safety, launching a new campaign urging drivers to stay alert and be mindful of the rules of the road in neighbourhoods where kids might be travelling to and from school. Designed in-house by the Town's Communications Department, signs are now available at Town Hall on a one-sign-per-household basis.

Statistics show that motor vehicle accidents involving pedestrians are on the rise in the GTA and York Region, said Anthony Ierullo, Acting Manager of Corporate Communications for the Town of Aurora. In addition, there has also been an increase in pedestrian deaths caused by motor vehicles recently. The majority of these accidents occur at night when visibility is limited.

The purpose of the campaign is to increase driver awareness of children walking, riding and playing in school zones. The campaign also empowers residents to be active in the community and promote safety.

The arrival of the school year and the shorter days of the fall signalled the ideal time to launch the program, he added. Each sign is emblazoned with colourful, easy-to-identify graphics and clear messaging and is now available for pickup from the Town's Customer Relations Desk.

The sign initiative came about through a grant given to Aurora's Infrastructure and Environmental Services Department. The money was intended to design and launch the program. The resulting design came to be seen as a benchmark in York Region, added Mr. Ierullo, and is set to be rolled out across the Region.

The design and concept also won the backing of Council this month, who agreed posting these signs will allow neighbours and neighbourhoods a certain degree of taking charge of local traffic concerns.

Councils are typically confronted with large capital demands for traffic calming, said Patrick Moyle, Acting CAO for the Town of Aurora. There is a lot of money which has to be spent to retrofit streets. The frustration from a resident's point of view is what can they do to participate in the whole issue of safety? These kinds of programs have been around in a number of municipalities and it is an opportunity for the residents to take charge.

Councillors, however, questioned how much this program will cost in the long run. According to Mr. Ierullo, there aren't any further budget dollars allocated for the program above and beyond this initial print run of 500 lawn signs. If the program is well-received and there is a demand for them, then Council could then initiate that conversation, he added.

It was a conversation they were nevertheless eager to have.

When you have a high concentration of signs, approximately every other household, it seems to have a measurable impact on speeds in that neighbourhood, said Councillor Harold Kim. That is why I think the more signs we have the more effective this program will be.

Added Councillor Wendy Gaertner: I think we have 12 public schools in Aurora. 500 signs is going to be a drop in the bucket, so I think we'll need to have some discussions around that as well.

A similar view was offered by Councillor John Abel, who joined Councillor Michael Thompson in suggesting there need to be additional measures in place to determine the success of the program above and beyond the number of signs picked up by residents.

?I applaud every measure going forward, but we will see how effective it is and if we still have the same complaints [of] drivers texting, not stopping, going too fast at all hours,? he said. ?But it does give the idea that, as a community, our residents are speaking in the same tone.?