

Plows could make winter walking easier in some Aurora parks

By Brock Weir

Snow can often put roadblocks on our favourite paths from point A to point B, but getting around Aurora on foot could be just as easy in the winter as in the summer if Council gets its way.

Councillors will soon be examining adding paved park pathways into Aurora's winter maintenance program. The report is the result of a notice of motion from Councillor John Abel, who said plowing hard park paths would be a way to encourage pedestrians to get out and a way to ease traffic congestion.

Although his original motion focused particularly on plowing the Machell Park pathway between Orchard Heights Boulevard and Aurora Heights Drive, it also called on a report on other paths that might fit the bill.

"We have a great trails system and we are unable to plow them because the trail is often uneven, it is gravel-based, but we do have some arterial pathways that we do plow," said Councillor Abel. "I am just asking we include them."

Clearing the Machell Park pathway was a concern Councillor Abel said he heard frequently on the campaign trail and was bringing it forward as a result.

Councillors, however, were not keen to approve the request outright without further information on how much this would cost to Aurora's winter budget.

Ilmar Simanovskis, Aurora's Director of Infrastructure and Environmental Services, said he didn't have a handle on how much this would cost the Town if it chose to proceed, but that could be the subject of a future report.

"We clear paths that go from a cul-de-sac that would connect to another part of the subdivisions so there are some lengths that are paved and essentially form part of the sidewalk," he explained. "We don't plow what I would call trails or other connections."

Other Councillors expressed a degree of caution.

"I am in favour of this, but I just want to make sure we are going in with our eyes open," said Councillor Paul Pirri, asking for the cost implications.

A similar view was offered by Mayor Geoff Dawe.

"In principle, I support the idea, but this indicates a change to our service level that Council just recently approved in terms of our snow clearing," he said. "I would ask for the cost implications. I would prefer if this was actually referred to budget because I think there are more implications than that. I think we need to have a better handle on that in terms of what other impacts it might have."

Councillor Harold Kim, on the other hand, welcomed the motion on the table with open arms.

"I think it is a great idea because there are a lot of regularly used pathways I have noticed throughout Town that you can't walk through during or after a heavy snowstorm," he said. "I have a problem with just one area of the Town being serviced that way because I am sure there will be other residents where they might consider to be high need."

Councillor Kim added that more feedback on the matter was needed from residents.

Aurora currently clears over 200 km of sidewalks as part of its annual winter maintenance program, according to Mr. Simanovskis.