

Residents cite safety concerns in trail link

By Brock Weir

A proposed trail route to connect the east and west portions of the Oak Ridges Moraine Trail in the Yonge Street and Bloomington Road area has raised objections from neighbouring residents.

Residents on Championship Circle, near Ridge Road, in the Town's southwest corner, were on hand at last week's General Committee meeting expressing their objections to the planned trail link which would re-route trail and bike traffic westward from Yonge Street into the vicinity of their neighbourhoods.

Their criticisms included concerns for both safety and the environment.

'My concern is not with the trails system in general and I think they are great for residential areas but [these concerns are] for this particular segment in particular,' said resident Bob Hakeem. 'It is adjacent to my property, I have very young kids, and where it enters into the residential area is right off Yonge Street. It is not an intersection, it is not connected to another residential area, and my concern is just who is going to be in that trail area. My home would be about 6.5 feet away from [where the trail is planned.]

'It is right in the middle of nowhere and it has absolutely no purpose being there.'

This view was backed up by neighbour Alexandre Roger. He too has young children and while he said there would be 'nothing better' than taking the kids out onto a trail near their home and go hiking into the woods, the Yonge Street entrance was a primary concern.

'The trail has been identified in the trails master plan,' explained Al Downey, Aurora's Director of Parks and Recreation. 'It is the extension of the Oak Ridges Moraine trail and the committee's preference is to keep the trails off-road. The Trails Master Plan also identified the requirement of an underpass at this location under Yonge Street to cross the five lanes and move the trail eastward through Beacon Hall and ultimately connecting it in the eastern part of town.'

Mr. Downey conceded if it comes to fruition it will be an 'extremely long' underpass but there is no way of crossing the street there at grade.

Councillor Chris Ballard, vice-chair of Aurora's trails committee, said while the ultimate goal of the committee is to have an underpass, they are also looking at the possibility of having a signalized crossing at Ridge Road, but it is still 'early days'.

With the number of residents who came out in support of their fellow neighbours' concerns eleven in total were in attendance at last week's General Committee meeting. Councillors considered sending the recommendation back to the committee and providing further time for residents to make their case to the trails group.

Although some, such as Councillor Michael Thompson, conceded that the morning trail meetings might be a challenge for some to attend, other opportunities might be available as well.

'It would be fair to give notice to all the properties that are going to be affected,' said Councillor John Abel. 'They should have the opportunity to come forward.'

For Councillor Ballard, however, while he said the Trails Committee would have no objections to hearing from neighbours in this area, he stressed this was a long-term vision and not something that is going to pop up in their back yards in the next year or two.

'This is about the long-term vision for the trails system throughout all Aurora and making sure that the property is put aside [until] it is feasible and practicable to build sections of the trail,' he said. 'If we say no to this, and we say no to other trails, there is no second chance 20, 30, 40, or 50 years from now. It is the Committee's strong belief that it is [important] we make sure the right

property is put aside.?