

Seniors raise safety concerns on John West Way

Aurora is looking at new safety and traffic measures along John West Way after concerns were raised by members of the Aurora Seniors' Centre last week.

This month, Council is poised to approve a four-way stop on John West Way at Amberhill Way, just north of Town Hall and the Aurora Seniors' Centre.

The \$800 project received the tentative green light at last week's General Committee meeting following a presentation from Dave Legallais of the Aurora Seniors' Association.

The Association, he said, would like to see traffic slowed on Wellington Street to not only make it safer for local seniors who use the Centre, but for Town employees and drivers alike.

The south parking lot [at Town Hall] is used by members of the Seniors' Centre, Town employees and the public with business at Town Hall, he said. As a result, there are usually approximately 10 cars parked out on John West Way adjacent to the Seniors' Centre and Town Hall because the south parking lot is full. As membership at the Seniors' Centre grows, this is probably going to get worse.

Seniors often experience issues with balance, perception and ability to move quickly, which means crossing John West Way or entering and exiting their cars on John West Way can be frightening due to the speed of the vehicles that are travelling north and south on John West Way. If the parking lot is full, many of our members will leave and go home rather than park on John West Way, sadly missing their activities.

Public transit is not really a viable alternative to seniors, as it is not user-friendly in this case. They must exit and enter the bus from the east side of John West Way, causing them to have to cross against the traffic both ways to get to the Centre and back to the bus. We realize the speed limit on John West Way has been reduced from 50 to 40 km an hour. This is good, but it does not seem to really have had a significant reduction in the speed of the traffic.

A report before Council last week indicated that a recent traffic study has shown that traffic in the area does not meet the warrants to require a four-way stop, but Mr. Gallais said sometimes formulas and charts don't represent the reality of what is happening in the area.

This was a view shared by the majority of Council, including Councillor Sandra Humfries who said that she didn't want to

wait for an accident to happen before implementing further safety measures in the area.

?It is economical, it is something we can put in quickly, and we can monitor to see what the impact of that is going to be,? she said.

Councillor Rachel Gilliland, who previously put forward a motion tasking staff to look at traffic calming measures in and around John West Way and Amberhill Way, was also supportive of moving forward with the four-way stop.

?This is a unique area,? she said, referring to the high density of housing in the area. ?I am looking at this report and it says within that hour, 820 vehicles in an hour. That is almost three times more than the warranted criteria. That has got to say a lot and it is only going to get worse. That stop sign needs to be there.

?We keep increasing our Town activities, we have people coming in from out of town in big busses, we had one come in for the Easter Egg Hunt ? where are all these people going? It is just an accident waiting to happen. I am not going to sit here and wait for an accident to happen.?

Added Councillor Wendy Gaertner: ?There are a lot of different components to this, but I do think that one of them is a stop sign. The truth of the matter is this is an exceptional area. We have a lot of seniors in this area and they need a little bit of extra respect and protection. The stop sign, to me, is a start, but I have some other ideas as well.?

Should the four-way stop be approved by Council on February 25, it is a step in the right direction but not the ?be all and end all?, according to Councillor John Gallo who said a four-way stop was only a band-aid solution and it doesn't address the real problem: parking at Town Hall and the Seniors' Centre.

?We need to put a lot of effort into [finding] a way to have Seniors' Centre [members] park in a parking lot, whether that means expanding something somewhere, whether that means some of our staff have to move out from the bottom part of the parking lot and into the upper or across the street to Queen's Diamond Jubilee Park,? he said. ?The issue is the parking on the streets and whether you have a stop sign there or not, we haven't solved the problem. There are still cars on that street?. They're still having to get out of their cars, their doors swing open into traffic. To me, this is a band-aid and we haven't really addressed the crux of the problem.?

Although Councillor Harold Kim supported the four-way stop in the end, he initially shared similar concerns to Councillor Gallo.

?I know that seniors have been waiting for something for a while but I would like to exhaust other

measures before we do this, because this is the hammer,? he said.

Compounding the issue,
added Councillor Michael Thompson, is the fact John West Way is increasingly
being used as a traffic bypass.

?It is a fast way to
circumvent all of the lights on Bayview and that is why we see significant
traffic and it is only going to continue to grow,? he said, agreeing that lack
of parking at Town Hall is a significant factor. ?Before we do any consultant
work and bring on traffic studies, we need to solve that parking problem and
figure out what then that area looks like before moving to that particular
motion. In the interim, I think the stop is a good measure while we start
addressing some of the issues like parking and so forth to at least bring a
little bit of a mitigating factor to the speed and to safety.?

Other suggestions floated by Council members at the table to address the traffic issue and John West Way's use as a bypass were a
reduced speed limit to 30 km/hour and a four-way stop at Hollidge Boulevard and McMaster Avenue.

By Brock Weir