

Speeding up St. John's interchange with Hwy 404 is top priority

By Brock Weir

Aurora's east side will soon have thousands of new residents as development of the 2C lands continues, but as this community comes closer and closer to fruition, so too should St. John's Sideroad's interchange with Highway 404.

Currently scheduled to be constructed in 2031, Councillor Michael Thompson has a motion before Council this week which will request the Region of York to bring this timeline up by more than a decade.

"I think we're already seeing challenges with the interchange at Wellington and 404 during rush hour and we have a tremendous amount of residents that will come into the 2C lands, and that is just going to exacerbate the issue," says Councillor Thompson. "I think 2031 is too late and I would really like to see us work with the Region and move that timeline up significantly. You are going to see [all this traffic] get funnelled down to that interchange at Wellington and it is not going to be pleasant for those who are trying to get to work and get home at night."

Considering the development of the Region's Master Transportation Plan, the timing is right to start this conversation, he adds.

"It is not too bad today for most. It is not palatable, perhaps, but we're going to see 8,000 residents. How many cars does that represent in the next two years when we see plans fill up quickly?"

The acceleration of the interchange is one of several Councillor Thompson has been mulling over since last year's election campaign. In addition to a further motion coming forward this week which seeks to reaffirm Council's support of the Provincial Government's anti-SLAPP legislation, an initiative which got the thumbs-up in the last term, sport tourism, which is on the horizon, remains a high priority initiative in his book.

Talks are ongoing with stakeholders on ways to boost sport tourism, he says, including the idea of a Sport Development Officer at Town Hall, a position which was floated by a number of 2014 candidates.

"We are looking at some of the other municipalities who develop sport policy and sports plans and seeing if there are opportunities there to incorporate some of that in Aurora to help really focus on our strategic objectives," says Councillor Thompson, noting a key portion of this will be a Master Parks and Recreation plan which will identify future needs and opportunities.

"There are some needs down the road for more facilities in certain areas of the Town as well so we can maintain those service levels of X number of fields for X number of residents, but in addition to it there is a little bit of a chicken and egg scenario. We do need a hotel in Town to allow us to pursue some of these tournaments and other sporting opportunities to drive economic business to Town and make Aurora attractive in that sense. At the same time, you have to develop these things to entice a developer to put up a hotel. How that is best approached, I don't know at this point, but that is part of the conversation of how to get there. There seems to be tremendous interest from the various sports groups as well as others to find a way forward."