

Streetscape improvements re-examined for Downtown Promenade

They were largely left on the backburner nearly nine years ago, now Council is set to re-consider streetscape improvements to make Aurora's Yonge and Wellington corridors more attractive for residents.

Council has received a report on potential streetscape improvements in the Aurora Promenade Area.

A list of potential improvements was first presented to Council in 2013 and while some of the recommendations were put in place over the last eight years, others were either rejected or postponed. Now, according to Lisa Hausz, Economic Development & Policy Manager for the Town, it is time to re-evaluate the original suggestions, considering 'new policies, technologies and needs.'

Among the improvements up for consideration are street light pole replacements along Yonge Street, new illuminated features signaling the start of the Promenade area, sidewalk and crosswalk improvements and enhancements, parking improvements in the Downtown BIA area, and improved broadband/high speed internet and cell service.

'Several factors informed the need to evaluate and recommend the increased scope of the Streetscape Design and Implementation Plan including: condition of infrastructure to accommodate future signage and lighting needs; current developments underway in the area; connectivity and broadband availability; parking requirements; accessibility needs; and the involvement of the local businesses and residents in the area,' said Ms. Hausz in her report to Council.

'The majority of the proposed streetscape improvements will occur on Yonge Street and Wellington Street. An approach to focus on 'main street' areas first was intended to ensure that a critical mass of improvements could be completed within a relatively short timeframe in a focused geographic area. A Streetscape Needs Assessment is now being undertaken to validate the original proposed improvements while taking into consideration new policies, technologies and needs. The intent of the Streetscape Needs Assessment is to solicit feedback through consultation with various groups and the public that will inform an updated plan.'

From the perspective of Councillor Wendy Gaertner, however, one area where the list of potential improvements falls short is bringing street trees to the corridor.

'We need street trees,' she said. 'I know that the underground infrastructure is not going to allow that and it would be very expensive, but even above-ground trees in planter boxes we will have to think of some way. I can't think of any downtown core that doesn't use trees to make it more inviting and I hope we can find a way to do this, somehow.'

Councillor Rachel Gilliland added that she was 'glad' to see Council was taking another look at recommendations to bring a 'more refreshed and revised look' to the area.

'I am happy to see we are consulting with all the Advisory Committees [with] different takes on all levels through heritage, environment and community engagement, as well as accessibility,' she said. 'I personally would love to see more green initiatives, whether it be through the kind of materials we use, being more forward-thinking as downtown has green components to it, whether it be streetscapes, electric vehicle chargers that are upgraded or something to that effect, and some uniformity in terms of the signage and the colours. I think there's a lot of great things we can do to improve, but I am excited to see what the community has to say.'

Given the fact Aurora is currently in the middle of updating its Official Plan, Mayor Tom Mrakas said 'a perfect storm is brewing' for Aurora.

'All these things I think combined are going to help us build on our past to build an exceptional future, not only for our downtown but for the whole municipality,' he said. 'All I can say to the residents is the best is yet to come.'

By Brock Weir Editor Local Journalism Initiative Reporter