

Williams student says new school location presents pedestrian challenges

The new location of Dr. G.W. Williams Secondary School on Bayview Avenue at Spring Farm was chosen to bring the school into the heart of the community it serves ? but, for some students, getting there is proving something of a challenge.

This was highlighted to local lawmakers last week by Matthew Romeo, a Grade 12 student at Williams, who walks to the school from his home near Bayview and St. John's Sideroad, observing some roadblocks along the way.

The first challenge, he said, is encountered on Earl Stewart Drive near the Shopper's Drug Mart Plaza.

?At this point, Earl Stewart curves west, at which the sidewalk ends and forces pedestrians to cross,? Romeo told Council. ?There are many visibility issues when crossing into the plaza from this point. Without any clear rules in place, there's confusion for the drivers trying to enter and exit. Better control of traffic is required in that area for it to be more safe for all the pedestrians and to organize the road traffic entering and exiting the plaza.

?A possible solution to eliminate the issue in the long term is continuing the sidewalk on the east side of Earl Stewart ? the McDonald's Plaza all the way to Superstore ? extend that one; there's an intersection, but it ends, so [it] forces them to go on this side of Earl Stewart and if we just extend that sidewalk there'd be no need to cross again.?

The second shortcoming identified by Romeo is near that McDonald's plaza at Bayview and Pedersen.

?The majority of pedestrian traffic actually comes from the corner of Bayview and Pedersen, which has no proper access point other than a steep and dangerous hill,? he continued. ?This, unfortunately, seems to be the current preferred entry point for pedestrians, especially the students of G.W. Williams. I understand that the property is not owned by the Town and may be more of a challenge to solve; however, I feel it's important to recognize this problem, especially with how many William students are actively entering and exiting the plaza because of the school's relocation.?

A set of stairs, similar to the one that connects the local Shopper's Drug Mart plaza to the Bayview sidewalk could be a ?solution worth considering,? he added.

?Both of these concerns have a common theme of safety and accessibility and design phase. As we promote walking as a form of active transportation, we have to understand that these properties must have safe entrances and exits to begin with, since public safety is one of the most important factors of design. Tonight, we're talking about eliminating risks that are already present. However, I believe we can do better to avoid those risks in the first place. If we can be more proactive about pedestrian accessibility in the design phase, we can build a safer community one step at a time.?

Romeo's concerns were addressed, in part, by staff and Council.

Ward 5 Councillor John Gallo thanked the student for personally walking him through some of his concerns and Director of Planning Marco Ramunno stressed that they would be looked into as part of Aurora's ongoing Town-wide Pedestrian Crosswalk Study.

A staircase at the McDonalds plaza, however, might not be feasible, he cautioned.

?When that was constructed? probably 10 years ago, we looked at the possibility of having a staircase up to Bayview, similar to the, as a delegate mentioned, the staircase at Shoppers or up the road at [Superstore]. The problem there in that location at the McDonald's Plaza?there's a huge grade difference. It's probably close to 20 feet between the plaza parking area and the top of Bayview,? said Ramunno.

?I can certainly reach out to the property owner to see if they'd consider installing a staircase, but again, we did have that discussion about 10 years ago when the application first came in, and it would be a significant size staircase down to that plaza. It's something I can certainly have a discussion with the property owner about and report back to Council.?

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