

Council looks at the best pedestrian crossing systems for Aurora Heights Drive and Hollandview Trail

Council last week discussed installing a more elaborate crossing system than recommended by staff to a highly programmed area, a decision that requires thousands more dollars but that will ensure pedestrian safety.

The area is located on Aurora Heights Drive near the southern terminus of the Machell Park trail and the northern terminus of Fleury Park Trail, where hockey games and summer festivals often take place. The need for a pedestrian crossing has been a source of contention for the neighbourhood for over a year, calling for decision-makers to act sooner than later.

Council also discussed installing a simple pedestrian crossing on Hollandview Trail south of St. Jerome Catholic Elementary School to the walkway located between Hollandview Trail and Bowler Street.

In a report before Council by Michael Ha, Transportation and Traffic Analyst, staff recommended installing a Level 2 Type D pedestrian crossover, characterized by warning signs and pavement markings and estimated at a cost of \$7,000.

Staff conducted a pedestrian crossover warrant analysis to determine the need of a controlled crossing and the appropriate type of crossing for the location.

However, Councillors felt that a more adequate pedestrian crossing type was needed.

As a popular crossing area that gathers a decent amount of pedestrian traffic, which might attract more pedestrians in the future depending on future developments in Town, such as an outdoor refrigerated skating rink, Councillors agreed that a bigger investment is needed.

"I tend to agree that we should be doing more than a level two type D to this location," said Ward 5 Councillor John Gallo. "I wouldn't want to do this twice if an additional facility is put there. And then we're going to have to redo this because there is going to be a lot of traffic going back and forth. So, I think we should put some more effort into determining, which is the best scenario considering what may be coming in the future."

Having said that, Councillor Gallo noted that the Town has \$47,000 remaining in their budget for the project, however a Level 2 Type B pedestrian crossing, characterized by rapid flashing beacons and overhead-mounted regulatory signs that provide additional visibility for oncoming traffic, has an estimated cost of \$50,000 to install.

If Council goes forward with installing a Level 2 Type B crossing, a budget allocation would be required to meet the additional funds, said Rachel Wainwright van Kessel, Director of Finance.

Councillor Gallo said he would like to get staff input on potential future facilities in the area near the pedestrian crossing to see whether a Level 2 Type B crossing would be necessary. Like most Councillors, he agreed that the recommended Type D crossing would not be sufficient when accounting for the amount of people and vehicles that cross that road.

Ward 2 Councillor Rachel Gilliland said she hopes the pedestrian crossing will be implemented soon, especially as the summer season approaches and more residents spend time outdoors.

A Type B pedestrian crossing with lights is her preference because more visibility for incoming traffic is needed, she said.

"I would like to incorporate a little bit more notification that somebody is actually crossing," Councillor Gilliland said, noting that the area is a highly programmed area that gathers a lot of pedestrian traffic.

"This is a very highly programmed area between hockey games, and different festivals and events that we have over at the park across the street. Children are going back and forth, it's a highly programmed area for soccer, baseball, parking going across the street. I just feel like this is a very busy intersection," she said.

"I just feel like if we're going to do it once, we do it right. And I would hate to see what happened on Henderson Drive where we came back and said, 'No, this is not good enough. We feel it's not safe. And people are not really alerted to the fact that there is a crosswalk here?' my preference would be to pick Type B and install some lights there, so give a little bit of notification."

As for the potential installation of pedestrian crossing on Hollandview Trail, the recommended Type D crossing should be sufficient, said Ward 1 Councillor Ron Weese, who walks in that area almost every day with his grandson.

"Every time, my wife tells me, 'Why don't we have a pedestrian crossing here?' So, I'm really happy to see it finally here in front of us," he said. "Frankly, I don't believe we really need to have a Type C or a Type B on there just because of cost."

Councillor Weese noted that there isn't much of a sightline problem at the end of the Hollandview Trail and there is not much vehicle traffic compared to the other area.

"So, I want to say that I think this is the right direction to go for that particular school in that particular crossing," he said.

On the other hand, Councillor Gallo recommended sending the report back to staff to investigate a different option. He noted that only 30 meters away from the proposed crosswalk area, a crossing guard is stationed.

"One of the things I had mentioned at the Committee is maybe this is overkill. Because the ramifications of this, is it really affects the homeowners there because we're going to have to now take a bunch of parking spots that those residents typically use, obviously in the summer months. If this is implemented, they will no longer have those," he said.

"I think I'd love staff to come back and actually think of a way to block with a fence or some type of structure and point with signage, 'walk 30 meters that way, and there's a crossing guard and you can safely cross the street.'"

Councillor Gallo added that it will accomplish what the Town is hoping to achieve without the expenses and hassle of removing parking spots.

Additional information will be received later this month about the budget and timeline of the project.

By Elisa Nguyen