

One-way traffic considered on Kitimat until safety situation is solved

Residents of the Aurora Heights community might soon be asked about the viability of temporary one-way traffic on Kitimat Crescent as the Town and the York Region District School Board look at ways of improving pedestrian and student safety in the area.

The idea of one-way traffic on Kitimat as a temporary relief measure was floated to Council last week by area residents Leslie Jennings and Dan Elliott in a written delegation to the June 2 General Committee meeting.

In their delegation, the residents said they "accepted" Council's decision to implement sidewalks on the street "despite its personal financial impact" to residents and supported the recommendations from a stakeholder working group for a layby lane. But they contended this is only a part of a solution for area traffic woes.

"Despite the current No Parking restrictions in front of the school and the Town's current enforcement, every school day parents choke that curb lane while dropping off or, worse, waiting for their children after school," they said. "This line of parked cars restricts travelling" to pretty much only a single lane of traffic, particularly when a truck or a school bus is trying to get through. This makes getting through that area very frustrating for drivers going in both directions. Without the layby, the single lane scenario will continue.

"Since the layby is not yet designed and won't be [built] until next year, we ask Council to consider making Kitimat Crescent a one-way street from the school until the layby is completed. Doing so will eliminate the parents from making dangerous U-turns and three-point turns on blind corners and narrow streets on Kitimat, as well as reduce the congestion of traffic at the crosswalk corners by eliminating traffic trying to exit Kitimat there. Several neighbours are supportive of a temporary one way street as part of the solution."

This proposed temporary measure piqued the interest of Council at first blush, but Town Planner David Waters urged some caution, noting that staff first got wind of the proposal earlier that day.

"We're concerned about increased vehicle traffic speeds on Kitimat Crescent and Tecumseh because of the one-way traffic," he told Council following a motion from Councillor Wendy Gaertner to proceed with the residents' recommendations. "It results in an increase of travel distance as well, particularly for emergency vehicles, and we're also concerned about compliance and the presence of York Regional Police in terms of any enforcement. We're not sure they will actually enforce the one-way signage because they have other issues to deal with. I think, at the end of the day, we're concerned about creating another Centre Street and that's cars travelling

the wrong way and residents upset about it and we're back at the table with a solution to something that could be avoided just by remaining a two-way street.

Following Mr. Waters' opinion, Council agreed that fine details needed to be hammered out, but it was still an idea worth exploring and finding out if neighbours agreed with the delegates in the first place.

I am always concerned when we put forward traffic amendments or changes without getting staff to weigh in and provide their professional opinion, said Councillor Michael Thompson. If Council [wanted] to consider the various options, then, at a minimum, it should be referred back to staff so they can provide us with their input and their expertise.

Councillor Harold Kim agreed, noting he was appreciative of the residents' suggestions.

At the surface level, it may seem like it was wisely thought out, but I had the same internal discussions with staff and what Mr. Waters has stated to me I can't support the one-way street. It is no different from residents saying 'we should change the width of a road from eight metres to six metres' those are things that we want the professionals and our staff to weigh in and they have weighed in.

But Councillor John Gallo said he was interested in getting a fulsome report.

I don't have an issue sending it back to staff to review it and come back to us with a formal report and, perhaps, some sense of if the community wants this or not, or how effective it will be, he said.

Councillor Gaertner supported this, putting forward a motion that a one-way option be sent back to staff for further consideration, along with a traffic study to determine whether such a pilot project should remain temporary or be made a long-term measure.

But, while the motion passed, some Councillors were unconvinced including Councillors Kim and Rachel Gilliland.

I feel like we're swaying our attention in a whole other direction and opening up a different can of worms that may require a different kind of focus, said Councillor Gilliland. I really, truly believe we need to be using our resources on the layby and the sidewalk what we were originally discussing here today.

By Brock Weir