

Safety trumps cost as speed hump project moves forward

By Brock Weir

The safety of residents outweighed a significant increase in costs last week as Council moved forward on a pilot project to install a series of speed cushions on sections of three busy local streets: Kennedy Street West, Mavrinac Boulevard, and McMaster Avenue. Councillors, sitting at the Committee level last week, decided to forge ahead with the pilot on all three streets after considering starting with the Kennedy stretches after bids for the total project came in \$40,000 over the estimated budget.

Staff initially suggested putting the pilot on ice until the New Year and re-tendering when prices might be more competitive in the paving industry, but although history indicates getting new bids in the winter results in a better price, Ilmar Simanovskis, Aurora's Director of Infrastructure, said it was not a guarantee.

On September 20, Council asked for more information on what it would cost to carry out a separate contract just for Kennedy and re-tendering for the balance. They learned at last week's General Committee meeting that this would cost more than half of the project's original \$100,000 budget at \$52,305.

'If Council is making a decision to proceed with some, I think we should proceed with all because we're proceeding with some based not on a financial perspective, but because we think there is a safety issue and I think we need to move forward,' said Councillor Michael Thompson, responding to a motion put forward by Councillor Tom Mrakas that they proceed with Kennedy. 'If [safety] is the rationale to proceed with some, then I think that is the same rationale over all three. I don't see how you can say this takes precedence over another one without taking into consideration that impact.'

This was a view shared by Councillor Jeff Thom, who said the safety factor changed the landscape.

'That is the rationale moving forward with Kennedy, that if it is safer, what about the other two?' he said. 'I will remind everyone that we're talking about a pilot project. If we're going ahead with that one, find the funding source [for the rest].'

Councillor Mrakas, on the other hand, said he had no issue in awarding the whole project but given the previous week's discussion, said he didn't feel anyone was in favour of it going ahead over-budget, so simply moving forward Kennedy Street seemed the next logical step.

'I thought it would be more suitable and more agreeable if we just worked on that one, saw how it went, and then worked on the other two, but [if everyone is comfortable] let's work on all three,' he said.

For some Councillors, however, 'agreeable' might not have been the right word, but simply an acknowledgement of reality.

'Let's do this,' said Councillor Harold Kim. 'It is painful to think that we're paying more than we should have but, again, whatever the probabilities might be, the pricing might be lower in the spring. Because there is no guarantee and there is a safety issue, let's do it all at once instead of dragging it out for another 16 months.'

Added Councillor Wendy Gaertner: 'I am going to vote for this, but it really pains me because we are putting safety in one hand and fiscal responsibility in the other, and safety has always trumped. Wow.'