

Sidewalk connection between park and Town Square reconsidered due to potential tree damage

Council has reconsidered a proposal to enhance connections between Town Park and the Town Square redevelopment through a new sidewalk on the north side of Metcalfe Street.

This past Spring, the majority of Council approved tasking staff with the in-house design of the sidewalk, which would extend from Wells Street to Victoria Street, alongside the boundary of Trinity Anglican Church.

The idea was to increase pedestrian access between the two gathering spaces present and future, but concerns were raised by area neighbours that building a sidewalk on the north side of Metcalfe would not only be unnecessary but could have negative impact on heritage trees in the area.

Upon completion of the sidewalk designs, the Town consulted Davey Tree Resource Group (arborist) to complete a site assessment determine the feasibility of the proposed sidewalk designs, identify any potential risks and/or impacts to the existing heritage trees due to construction, and provide technical recommendations, said Garry Anggawinata, Project Delivery Coordinator for the Town of Aurora, in his report to this week's General Committee meeting.

The potential implications associated with the construction of the sidewalk on the existing mature vegetation [is] a moderate risk of adversely impacting the health and stability of existing deciduous trees located at the west end of Metcalfe (near Victoria Street) [and] a high risk of adversely impacting the health and stability of existing heritage coniferous trees located at the east end of Metcalfe Street (near Wells Street).

As such, staff is recommending against the proposed sidewalk.

Due to the high risks of impacting existing heritage trees, Town Staff does not recommend the construction of a sidewalk on the north side of Metcalfe Street, said Anggawinta. This risk is especially high at the northwest corner of Metcalfe Street and Wells Street where it is densely vegetated with sensitive mature coniferous trees. Although the risks are lower on the west side of the street, it is not recommended to construct a sidewalk that terminates halfway through the block where there are no designated intersections or pedestrian crosswalks as it poses safety issues.

Pedestrians can access the existing sidewalk located on the south boulevard of Metcalfe as the pedestrian connection between Library Square and Town Park. It should be noted that the existing crosswalk at Metcalfe and Wells Streets is located on the south side of Metcalfe Street. Pedestrians using the walkway on Metcalfe would need to cross to the south side in order to access Town Park as there are no designated crosswalks or existing sidewalk at the northeast corner of Metcalfe Street and Wells Street. In addition, existing sidewalks on Church Street and Victoria Streets offer options for pedestrian connectivity between the two public facilities.

Meeting at the Committee level this month, Council members agreed with staff's assessment and could press staff for further options next week.

The intent was to create linkage between Town Square and Town Park, said Councillor Michael Thompson, noting he supported the revised recommendations from Town Staff citing tree safety. I would still like us to consider some sort of connection. I don't want to lose sight of the fact we want to create that linkage between the two properties. While we have ruled this one out that leaves you with Mosley or the mid-block. I want to make sure we have a long-term vision for both properties and what could be the future development.

We've talked about it from a Cultural Precinct perspective that over the long period of time we certainly see further commercial uses [private and public] and we need to have that connection either through Mosley or the mid-block. I hope it will stay on the radar

and staff will continue to look at ways to foster that connection.?

Councillor Sandra Humfryes was another lawmaker who wanted to make sure that considering alternative connections was still at the forefront.

?It is really important to have our Town Square super-connected to all of our downtown core,? she said. ?We need to look at that mid-block area or think a little bit in terms of signage and walkways, pointing to certain areas to get across. Mosley would be amazing. We [need to] ensure there is clear connectivity for residents. This is for more than just our local residents; we know where to walk and find it, but this is for visitors so it makes it easier or them to explore downtown and all of those areas.?

Staff indicated that with the Metcalfe sidewalk out of the equation, there are few alternatives left to consider beyond the mid-block and Mosley, both of which could be subject to a further report on costs if Council deems it necessary at next Tuesday's meeting.

By Brock Weir Editor Local Journalism Initiative Reporter