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Council flip-flops on sidewalk issue

BY FRANCES NIBLOCK
Special

In an about-face move predicted to upset some Main St., Georgetown residents, Halton Hills council revived plans

for a sidewalk on the east side of Main between Maple Ave. and Park Ave.

All councillors except Ward 2's Rob Heaton voted to reinstate the sidewalk in the Main Street reconstruction project at a recent council meeting, but not before

several complained that they were "concerned" and "confused" to hear that the Georgetown Central BIA (Business Improvement Area) Board and some members of the town's Residents and Neighborhood Group (RNG) committee want the sidewalk.

BIA board chair and RNG committee member Nathalie Ramakers urged council to include the sidewalk for the safety of seniors and school children walking to the downtown and to help create a pedestrian-friendly gateway to the core.

"Having a sidewalk on the east side is a great concern to the BIA and some members of the RNG committee," Ramakers said, adding it would be foolish and more expensive to install a sidewalk later, if necessary, as suggested by staff.

Acton Councillor Norm Elliott said he was frustrated and puzzled that the BIA's position on the sidewalk hadn't surfaced until after council approved the final design and suggested that the project's public input process was flawed.

Ward 4 Councillor Ron Chatten echoed Elliott's concerns, suggesting the public input process shouldn't be used again because it didn't work.

Peter Linn, the town's manager of design and development, said staff removed the east side sidewalk from the final design, based on the RNG consensus report and on a letter from the Cote Terrace seniors indicating that they didn't see a benefit to the sidewalk.

"We felt it was more prudent not to install the sidewalk given, at that time, that it was clear that the public did not want the sidewalk on the east side of the road," Linn explained.

Although he didn't think another public meeting was necessary if the sidewalk was put back in the plan, Linn said he'd be "somewhat concerned" if other RNG committee members didn't get to voice their concerns and warned council that it was "only hearing one side of the story."

In support of their motion for the east side sidewalk Ward 3 Councillors Moya Johnson and John Day argued that it will be safer, cheaper and less destructive to install the sidewalk now and not later, as proposed by staff.

"All along I felt the sidewalk was necessary and was quite disappointed when it was out of the plan," Johnson said, adding that concerns about the safety of children and seniors must be considered.

The \$719,000 budget for the entire reconstruction of Main Street from Maple Avenue to Church Street—originally estimated at \$425,000—already includes \$20,000 for the sidewalk. Staff said that changing the design plan would not delay the proposed summer construction schedule.

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