

Politicians and staff 'walk the walk' to improve safety

A walking/rolling tour of Acton's Mill Street highlighted a number of safety and accessibility issues that people in wheelchairs, or those that use mobility devices or push strollers, face as they try to get around town.

Invited on the tour by Acton's Lorna Brooks, who is wheelchair bound, Mayor Rick Bonnette, Acton Councillors Jon Hurst and Clark Somerville and the Town's Superintendent of Public Works, Dick Spear, braved the sweltering heat on Monday to walk the length of Mill Street to see what issues there are from an accessibility point of view.

Following a walkability workshop last month Brooks wanted local politicians and staff to see first hand what she and others face as they try to navigate the downtown. She was impressed that the politicians and staff were willing to "walk the walk" and not just "talk the talk."

"It was very productive, I think," Brooks said after

the tour. "I know that it will take time and money to fix the problems, but I think now that they've seen the issues – uneven pavement, unsafe curb cuts and problems with the road – from my point of view, that they will be dealt with."

Brooks said one of the biggest issues is the unsafe conditions at the railway crossings in Acton. She said the unevenness makes it difficult to get across for people in wheelchairs, those that use walkers or moms pushing strollers.

"The tracks are deplorable and I try to avoid them whenever I can, but if I want to go to the east end of town, there's no way to avoid them," she said, adding the Mayor promised he would raise the issue with Goderich Exeter Railway officials.

"The tour pointed out a lot of deficiencies and not just for people in wheelchairs," Mayor Bonnette said on Monday.

"It was very educational. There were a lot of

little things that we take for granted, like the angle of the curb cuts. At one point Lorna (Brooks) had to go out onto the road because of the condition of the sidewalk," Bonnette said.

Dick Spear, the Public Works Superintendent, said the repairs and improvements would be made as soon as possible in a phased approach, as money becomes available.

"It would take a lot of money to do it all at once, but we can make some of the improvements now. We will continue to replace the uneven bricks with concrete this summer and work on the slopes at the curb cuts," Spear said, adding the sidewalk will be replaced on the north side of Mill Street, between Willow and Main Street, before then end of August.

"We weren't fully aware of the difficulty some people have getting around in Acton, but now we know what needs to be done," Spear said



ACCESSIBILITY TOUR: Town politicians and staff joined wheelchair-bound Acton resident Lorna Brooks on a tour of the downtown on Monday, noting uneven pavement, sharp drops at curbs cuts and other issues that could cause safety and mobility problems for people in wheelchairs, or those who use a walker or push a stroller. Councillors Clark Somerville (left) and Jon Hurst joined Mayor Rick Bonnette and Dick Spear, Superintendent of Public Works on the tour. – Frances Niblock photo

after the tour, adding they will install "blind lines" approaching the main intersections – lines in the concrete that will alert people with diminished eyesight who use a cane that they are approaching an intersection.

Spear said they have already made some improvements in the downtown core – replacing some of the uneven sidewalks and grinding down high spots that could cause a fall, and the Town will con-

tinue to work on issues as the money becomes available.

Spear said there is no money currently in the budget to do additional work, but they will try to accommodate the jobs within existing budgets.

Halton police focus on road safety

So far in 2010, there have been six fatal motor vehicle collisions in Halton where the victim was under 25 years old, with two being high school students.

Road safety is a primary focus of the Halton Region-

al Police Service. In an effort to educate and create awareness among young and inexperienced drivers, the Halton Regional Police Service partnered with the Halton District School Board, Halton Catholic School Board, North Halton Injury Prevention Committee and Smart Risk in an initiative to address student awareness of impaired driving and road safety. This initiative was timed to coincide with the end of the school year and prom season.

In May, Halton Police officers conducted awareness "Spot Checks" at high schools across the region to distribute educational materials to students and parents. The initiative focused on four key areas: impaired driv-

ing - alcohol or drugs, speed, inexperienced drivers, and distracted driving.

Numbered "Drive to Arrive Alive" postcards with key safety messages were distributed. At the conclusion of the campaign a draw was held where the winning school received \$500 to support a school initiative. The \$500 was generously donated by the North Halton Injury Prevention Committee. This process encouraged students to hold onto the cards and reflect on the important messages being presented.

Last Tuesday, a cheque for \$500 was presented to the winner of the draw - Acton High School (Student Council) by Deputy Chief Bob Percy who stated, "We can never underestimate the power of education and awareness to keep this issue alive – which is ultimately our goal to help to encourage everyone to "Drive to Arrive Alive."

In conjunction with the postcard spot check program, it was recognized that students have a voice and know their audience best. Georgetown District High School technology students undertook a video project geared towards the risks associated to drinking and driving.

The result was an impactful message from students to students. This video was posted to "You Tube" (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IMNYDGAe86o>).

Percy also said, "This two prong approach demonstrates that positive results can be obtained when we address an issue together. Partnerships are and will remain a key to our collective success, and through engaging and empowering youth as part of the solution the results speak for themselves."

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