

Editorial ? Stairway to common sense?

We have to be a little guarded about the topic we're about to address.

While it deals with an event that we applaud, it's also something we need to be careful about encouraging.

An Etobicoke senior, named Adi Astl, was evidently getting tired about steep embankment from street level to an area park. There had been reports that people had been injured trying to access the park.

Officials from the City of Toronto had apparently looked at the situation, and determined that rectifying it would be expensive.

Published estimates have ranged from \$65,000 to \$150,000.

Astl, according to reports, took matters into his own hands, went out and bought some wood, enlisted the assistance of another man, and built a set of stairs. It's also reported that some of his neighbours chipped in on the project, which cost about \$550. Looking at the lowest estimates that apparently came from the City, the project cost about 0.846 per cent of the projections.

?I thought they were talking about an escalator,? Astl commented, according to CTV News.

In addition, the project took a matter of hours to complete.

And, according to published accounts, the stairs appeared to be completely serviceable.

Mayor John Tory was correct when he agreed the figures from the City were ?completely out of whack with reality,? according to CTV

And in keeping with reality, Astl has been receiving considerable praise for his action.

We have heard of at least one resident ready to reimburse him for the \$550, and others seem willing to chip in as well.

The steps were removed Friday morning, but Tory has said there will be a set of stairs installed to City standards, with a ceiling cost of \$10,000. That's a lot more than Astl spent, but it certainly more realistic than the figures the City had reportedly quoted.

There are many who are looking to Astl as a hero, and with good reason. We all tend to admire people who stand up to the system. But we also acknowledge that it is not something we can encourage.

This man broke the rules, even if it is generally acknowledged that his heart was in the right place. And no matter how absurd they might appear to be, those rules are in place for reasons; usually very good reasons.

No matter how skilled a craftsman might be, if public infrastructure is going to be the result, it has to be built to a certain standard, and that means reviews of plans, inspections, etc. And if public dollars are going to be spent on such projects, there must be officials in place to ensure those doing the job really know what they are doing, and are doing the work properly. Such checks are necessary, and they unfortunately can cost a lot of money, although it is clearly easy to argue that something in the range of 65 to 150 grand for a job like this is ridiculous.

We must always be mindful that a failure in such a construction can lead to injuries, and that can add up to serious legal and financial issues for the municipality. In fact, if the reports are true that there had been injuries sustained by people traversing the slope Astl was so concerned about, we have to wonder if there has already been legal action, and why the City hasn't already acted. We can't believe the conditions and frustrations Astl encountered are unique to Toronto. Obviously, there are people in every municipality, including Caledon, who are not pleased with the way things are, and are of the opinion that steps to rectify them are not being taken fast enough.

There are many who would like to take actions similar to those of Astl, and many more who would applaud, even if they themselves could not bring themselves to act.

But this is not a time for copycats.

Acts like those of Astl might produce desired results, but only if they used very infrequently. Having them become too common could result in stronger sanctions against the transgressors.

Is that what we really want to see?