

Residents call for few if any changes to Belfountain roads

By Bill Rea

Peel Region is continuing with its environmental assessment study of some of the roads in and around Belfountain, and local residents are making it clear they don't want to see a lot of changes.

About 100 of them were on hand for last Thursday's meeting at Belfountain Public School, and many of them made it clear they weren't enthused with what's going on.

The Region is looking into what improvements are needed along Winston Churchill Boulevard, Olde Base Line Road, Mississauga Road and Bush Street in Belfountain, and the point has been made repeatedly that they are looking for input from the public.

'It's really critical that we hear from you,' meeting facilitator Sue Cumming told the audience.

Steve Ganesh, manager of transportation program planning with the Transportation Division of Peel Public Works, told the meeting this was the second public session that's been held on the study (the first was in October). As well, a community working group (CWG) has been formed to look into the matter, and several members of the group were at last week's meeting.

Project Manager Tyrone Gan said the study is still in its early stages, adding there will be another public session sometime in the fall. He also said the timelines for these studies usually take five to seven years. He said that will end with preliminary designs for the recommended improvements to the roads, whatever they are.

The study was announced in July 2012, Gan said. Since then, the CWG has been established and held two meetings.

So far, he said the public input has stressed the need to maintain the rural character and countryside scenic quality of the area, preserve historic features and the natural environment, and maintain existing vertical alignment and cross-sections of the roads. As well, he said there have been calls to balance the interests of all residents, address poor pavement conditions, improve pedestrian safety, deal with excessive traffic speeds, look into the issue of truck traffic, accommodate cyclists, improve sightlines in some places, look into parking congestion during weekends and address motorcycle traffic.

Gan added the work so far has revealed there are problems identified in the study, including deficient pavement conditions and drainage, deficient sightlines and safety issues for all users of the roads (including wildlife).

Most of the roads in the study are part of Peel's arterial road network, and Winston Churchill Boulevard is also part of the network for neighbouring Wellington County.

Citing traffic data compiled over the last 15 years, Gan said there hasn't been a major increase in volume numbers, although there have been noticeable shifts. For east-west traffic, he said some of the load has shifted from Bush Street to Olde Base Line Road, and the north-south movements have seen a shift from Mississauga to Winston Churchill.

Traffic speeds are a worry, with Gan saying the biggest problem is on Olde Base Line, with 85 per cent of the traffic going more than 20 km-h over the posted limit.

He also cited statistics that between 2006 and 2010, there were 68 accidents in the study area, and only six involved people being injured (no fatalities). He added 44 per cent of those incidents involved animals, including drivers swerving to avoid hitting them. Gan also commented on roadside hazards, like hydro poles, steep slopes, etc., as areas where there could be safety improvements. Sightlines involving driveways in numerous locations are another point of concern.

The hazards faced by local wildlife were on the minds of many people at the meeting.

'This is a refuge for them,' one woman declared, pointing out these animals have been driven out of other areas.

She added all the other matters are aggravating this problem. Citing the issue of speed, she said the faster traffic goes, the more animals get hit.

She also said traffic numbers are relatively stable, so she called for as little to be done as possible so things don't change.

One resident of Forks of the Credit Road said the road was rebuilt about five years ago, and since then it's become 'speedway central.'

He said if Mississauga Road was to be rebuilt and leveled, it will become a second speedway. He wondered how those speeds will be controlled, as he pointed out Caledon OPP doesn't have the time or resources to control speeds all the time.

He urged the Region to fix drainage problems on the road, and beyond that, leave things alone.

Gan told him they recognize the concerns.

'We will try to find the right balance,' he said.

Another man argued that truck traffic and excessive speeding is not part of the rural character of the area.

Several people wondered why the study is being conducted now, since there seems to be no pressing need for it.

Gan said it was originally planned for just Bush Street and Mississauga Road some years ago. He said they were looking at

pavement conditions and the need to accommodate pedestrians and cyclists. The Region eventually added the other roads to the study.

One woman said the residents have been dealing with these issues for years. She couldn't see the urgency, since traffic volumes aren't expected to change too much from planned development in Erin.

Gan repeated there are concerns about the condition of the pavement.

“The absence of collisions doesn't mean it's safe,” he observed.

“What the people want, you should go after,” one man remarked.

Another man charged the Region was using hysteria to do things people don't want. He said he drives Olde Base Line all the time and has never seen an accident.

“Why are you trying to fix a problem that doesn't exist?” he asked.

He too expressed the concern that if the roads are improved, speeds will increase.

Another man, who said he sits on CWG, said 20 accidents in five years could be attributed to road conditions. “How much safer can you make it?” he asked.

Gan replied the number of collisions is one indicator. They also look at things like the design standards for the roads.

One woman suggested making the speed limits 50 km-h throughout the study area, except in Belfountain. Gan said they were talking about a large section of road. “There's not one answer that fits all,” he said, adding they look at the character of each road “and what speed makes sense.”