

Support expressed for lower speeds around Belfountain

By Bill Rea

The roads around Belfountain could be seeing slower speeds, along with other measures to control traffic while maintaining the character of the area.

Peel Region officials reported at an open house held last week that's pretty much in keeping with what local residents have been calling for.

The open house was part of the environmental assessment study being conducted by the Region on the main roads in the area; namely Mississauga Road, Old Main Street, Bush Street in Belfountain, Winston Churchill Boulevard and Olde Base Line Road. The Region had also hosted a public session in May, at which many residents made it clear they didn't want to see much change. Reducing speed limits on several stretches of the roads in question are a big part of what the Region is looking at, according to Steve Ganesh, manager of infrastructure programming and studies with the Transportation Division at the Region.

The roads being studied are all part of the Region's arterial road network, with Winston Churchill also being part of the network in Wellington County. As well, the roads in the network provide connections with tourist destinations.

According to the material presented at last week's session, the message Regional staff heard in May was people in the area want to maintain the rural character and countryside scenic quality of the area. There have also been concerns about the impacts on private properties, which residents would want to see minimized. As well, desires were expressed to preserve historic features like fences, along with the natural environment. There have also been calls to address pavement conditions on the roads, as well as signage clutter. There have been calls to accommodate other users of the roads too, such as cyclists.

In addition, there were calls to maintain the existing vertical alignments and cross sections on the roads, while improving sightlines. Various deficiencies have been identified on all the roads involved in the study. In a couple of cases the travel lane width was seen as an issue, but Ganesh stressed they are not going to be increased.

'We're not widening the roads at all,' he declared, pointing out that would lead to increased speeds, which people in the area clearly indicated they don't want. 'People tend to drive slower when they're in a more confined area.'

The proposals presented last week include speed limit reductions on many, but not all the stretches of road in the study. The plan is to keep the posted limit on Old Main Street on the southern portion of Belfountain at 50 km-h, and going down to 40 within the hamlet. The stretch of Bush Street from a point just west of Shaws Creek Road to Winston Churchill would see the limit drop from 80 to 70. The speed limit on Winston Churchill is currently 70 km-h from Olde Base Line to 10 Sideroad, and then goes down to 60. The proposal is to make the whole stretch 60. The limit on Olde Base Line between Winston Churchill and Mississauga Road would drop from 60 to 50, and Mississauga between Olde Base Line and The Grange Sideroad would see the speed limit drop from 70 to 60.

Ganesh said enforcement of the new speed limits would be up to the Town, Region and Caledon OPP.

He added he's been hearing a lot of positive comments about the proposed new speed limits. There has been a community working group that's been dealing with the project team, and they all seem happy with what's being proposed.

'Tonight, that message was reinforced,' he said. 'Overall, I have great feedback from all the residents on the reduction in speed.'

In terms of timelines, Ganesh said an Environmental Assessment report will be filed with the Ministry of the Environment. That will likely be in May. Detailed design work will be carried out in 2014, and he said construction will likely be in 2017 and '18, depending on how long the detailed design work takes.

'I think for the most part, staff has a pretty good solution,' observed Councillor Richard Paterak, who was on hand for the session last week.

He pointed out the staff proposals address safety and drainage issues.

He did comment that people have indicated they don't want more sidewalks in Belfountain, but there are concerns about people walking on the roads.

'There's a risk management issue,' he said. 'The absence of accidents doesn't mean something is safe. It means you've been fortunate to that point.'

In terms of cost of the work, Paterak said nothing's been decided because there's been no decision yet on just what work will be done.

He said it might be phased in over four years.