

Town committee will look at St. Nicholas busing

By Bill Rea

Caledon now has a School Traffic Safety Committee, and one of their first jobs will be to look into the busing situation around St. Nicholas Elementary School in Bolton.

Town councillors Tuesday night ratified a confidential staff report that went to the General Committee a week ago, naming the members of the committee and giving them the authority to make comments and recommendations related to school traffic safety.

As well, councillors Tuesday night heard a presentation on the matter from Renata Gorenic, a parent at the school.

Parents have been upset since the start of the current school year over the decision to cut back on which students can be bused to the school. Student Transportation of Peel Region (STOPR) decided the students living east of Coleraine Drive would not be eligible for busing. The means they are forced to cross the intersection of Coleraine, King Street, Emil Kolb Parkway and Harvest Moon Drive. This intersection is part of the Bolton Arterial Road (BAR), which was designed to get truck traffic out of the village core.

Parents took their case to the Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board earlier this month, without much success.

There was a motion presented at that meeting to call on STOPR to re-instate the busing until Caledon could get its Traffic Safety Committee off the ground and had a chance to comment on the situation at the intersection. Board Chair Mario Pascucci had ruled the motion out of order, arguing the Board didn't have the authority to get involved in the operations of STOPR. Caledon representative Frank Di Cosala had challenged the ruling, but it was upheld by most of the trustees.

Material accompanying Tuesday's presentation raised a number of safety issues regarding the intersection, including the fact some sidewalks there border a ravine, there's an unprotected yield pad, etc.

Gorenic said STOPR had said this area of road could be designated a truck route, but she argued it already is. She said it's part of a bypass for the core and that trucks are forced to use it.

She added unlike similar intersections elsewhere in Peel, Caledon students don't have the alternative of accessing public transit.

Gorenic said this amounts to "discrimination and inequality for students in the Town of Caledon."

There are other potentially hazardous intersections in Peel where children have to cross. Gorenic said there's a place where they cross Dixie Road, but she added there's an underpass that they can use. There's no such facility for St. Nicholas students.

"For the first two weeks (of the school year), our children were facing danger," she declared. "Their safety was not a priority with STOPR."

She also said there have been some close calls at the intersection since the kids went back to school.

The Town put crossing guards at the intersection to help the students get to and from school, but Gorenic said there have been consequences from that. They have impeded traffic, especially vehicles trying to make turns, because of new laws that require turning traffic to completely yield to pedestrians. She added parents have reported seeing vehicles not yielding, even to the guards. As well, she said a lot of the youngsters have experienced stress trying to get across.

"What are parents to do?" she asked council, wondering why they're not being treated equally to other parents in Peel.

Gorenic also said she had a petition, with 1,412 signatures asking for the busing to be restored. She added it's going to Dufferin-Caledon MPP Sylvia Jones so she can present it to the legislature at Queen's Park.

Councillor Annette Groves expressed thanks to Gorenic and the other parents for all the hard work they have done on this matter, and she said all the related material will be forwarded to the Traffic Safety Committee. Mayor Allan Thompson said he would be passing it on to Peel Regional staff too.