

Town set to adopt Active Transportation Master Plan following Council debate

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Caledon will soon have a new policy framework for active transportation facilities and programs.

At Caledon Council's June 4 General Committee meeting, Councillors unanimously endorsed Caledon's new Active Transportation Master Plan (ATMP).

The plan has been in the works for two years, and has involved consultation with residents, community groups, conservation authorities, and other municipalities and levels of government.

The ATMP includes recommendations for over 400 kilometres of new active transportation facilities and more than 40 new policy and programming initiatives.

"ATMP framework and directions will make Caledon a leader in active transportation by providing all residents opportunities for a high quality of life and active living by ensuring that cycling and walking are convenient, comfortable, and sustainable modes of transportation for all ages, abilities and trip purposes; and, that all villages and urban centres are connected through a balanced network of on-road, on-boulevard and off-road safe facilities," reads a report on the ATMP submitted by Sabrina Davidson, a coordinator in Caledon's engineering, public works and transportation department.

Three people attended the June 4 meeting to delegate on the topic of the ATMP.

The first was Jerry Gorman, a Bolton resident and member of Caledon's Active Transportation Task Force (ATTF). He explained he supports the new ATMP and joined the ATTF to advocate for policies that support pedestrians.

"It is well known that walking is the most accessible form of exercise available for improving and maintaining good health," said Gorman.

He said when implemented, recommendations from the new ATMP will put pedestrians on the map. Gorman noted there are many opportunities to create new paths in Caledon, both in and out of built-up areas. Another area Gorman spoke on was signage.

"Years ago, I brought the need for wayfinding signage to the attention of Town staff, but was told that it would have to wait for an active transportation study. I'm glad to say that wayfinding signage has been addressed in section five of this report," said Gorman.

He went on to suggest the Town could expand on its "Visit Caledon" website to share information about new trails as they're implemented through the ATMP.

Regional Councillor Mario Russo said he appreciates Gorman's advocacy and that pedestrians will not be forgotten.

"That pedestrian connection, as you've indicated, is an asset to our community and your voice has not gone unnoticed," he said.

Mayor Annette Groves agreed with Gorman's point that walking is one of the best exercises for body and mind.

"Not only does it keep your heart healthy, it keeps your mind healthy. I think it's a great way to be outdoors," said Groves. "Thank you for your many years of advocacy for our trail system."

David Laing, a Brampton resident and founder of Bike Brampton, was next to delegate.

"Bike Brampton is a group of people who believe that communities should be offering safe and accessible transportation options that are healthier and more affordable for individuals, better for the community, and environmentally and economically sustainable," said Laing.

Laing said he was in support of the ATMP and that he's used Caledon's roads and trail systems extensively for cycling. He came to the June 4 meeting to advocate for the needs of utilitarian cyclists - those who cycle for transportation, rather than just recreation.

He said Caledon should be interested in promoting utilitarian cycling because every trip taken by bike instead of car reduces pollution, improves physical and mental health, lowers individual and societal economic costs, and reduces the need to build more roads.

Laing said utilitarian cyclists need safety and connectivity that's created through high-quality infrastructure.

"Anything that can be done to let the cyclists know that they are welcome and appreciated is important," said Laing. "Surface quality, wayfinding signage, year-round maintenance, lighting for nighttime use?"

Laing said research indicates installing bike lanes on a road improves safety for all road users by 30 to 50 per cent. He said data is important to convince naysayers that building cycling infrastructure is good for all.

Laing said Caledon's ATMP does a good job of balancing recreational and utilitarian needs. He said the plan could be improved by adding measures to ensure near-term actions are taken and making monitoring and evaluation more specific.

Another member of Caledon's ATTF, Wayne Noble, was next to delegate on the ATMP. He said some of his main priorities are trail connections and equity for trail users.

"We all know there's going to be a lot of growth coming there. So, we have to plan for that growth. There are going to be a lot of people that are going to be walking to work, walking to the grocery store, riding their bike to work," said Noble.

Groves and Regional Councillor Christina Early said Noble has been Caledon's biggest cycling advocate for many years and thanked him for his efforts.

Caledon's new ATMP will come to Caledon Council's June 25 meeting where it will be recommended for final approval.