

Town wants busing to stay as is for St. Nicholas School

By Bill Rea

There are still lots of concerns regarding children who have to walk to St. Nicholas Elementary School in Bolton, and the Town of Caledon is working on it.

Councillors recently voted to ask Student Transportation of Peel Region (STOPR) to maintain the current bus routes, especially in the area of Coleraine Drive and Harvest Moon Drive for the coming school year. Council also approved a new capital project for this year, that would see \$62,000 spent to install guardrails along the east side of Coleraine, north of King Street to De Rose Avenue. STOPR is a consortium between the Peel District School Board and the Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board to provide common administration on school busing issues throughout the region.

The issue was first raised earlier this year, when Trustee Frank Di Cosola, local representative on the Dufferin-Peel Board, expressed concern for the safety of students who would have to cross Coleraine to get to and from school.

STOPR reported it had reviewed the transportation eligibility for students at the school, and concluded that the completion of the widening of Coleraine and the installation of sidewalks means the STOPR would be cancelling bus transportation for many of these students, starting in September.

Di Cosola and others delegated council in June, armed with a petition calling for the bus service to be maintained.

Council at the time called on public works staff to meet with Peel Region Traffic Division staff, as well as STOPR, and report back on possible interim traffic safety measures.

The staff report that went to council last week originally called for two temporary crossing guards to be placed at the intersection of Coleraine and Harvest Moon, and that staff report back further in October. But council opted to push for busing.

Addressing the state of the intersection, the report stated it's been constructed to engineering standards, so the Town would not be in a position to declare it unsafe. There are also sidewalks that have been installed and are deemed to be safe.

The current posted speed limit on Coleraine and King approaching the intersection is 60 km-h.

The report also stated staff had been asked to carry out a crossing guard study. The study done in June might not have been reliable, since so many of the students were still riding buses to school.

There are pros and cons to having guards at signalized intersections, according to the report. It stated if the intersection has been designed according to current engineering standards, then it should be safe for children to cross on their way to and from school.

Putting in a guard when it's not warranted could cause impacts and delays to traffic flows, and could create confusion as to who or what is controlling traffic.

"This issue is one that is always full of emotion," the report said. "The issue with St. Nicholas Elementary School is that all of the facts required to make a fully-informed educated decision are not available at this time."

The interim plan that staff was proposing called for two crossing guards to be hired at the start of the coming school year, improvements to the crosswalk, construction of the guardrails, a study to see if permanent guards are warranted an updated traffic study and staff follow-up.

Council also heard from local resident Renata Gorenc, a St. Nicholas parent, who reminded them they were talking about elementary school children, "not regular pedestrians."

"Our children's safety is a worthy cause," she added.

Councillor Rob Mezzapelli said he understood it's best to do the studies and have a full appraisal of the situation before taking action.

There was some concern with the crossing guards being taken out of the council resolution. But Director of Public Works David Loveridge said if the bus service is going to be maintained, the guards aren't needed. If the board isn't able to get STOPR to keep the buses, staff can come up with a revised recommendation.

He added that based on previous experience, STOPR will try to maintain its position to stop the buses.

There were also concerns that if guards are in place, STOPR might have another reason for stopping the buses.

"We don't want to give STOPR an out," Town CAO Doug Barnes remarked, as he suggested an amendment that would authorize Loveridge to bring in the guards if STOPR doesn't maintain the buses.

Councillor Annette Groves commented that Di Cosola is working with STOPR and the support of council would be helpful.

"I'm sure that he's confident he's going to get this moving forward," she remarked.

Councillor Nick deBoer commented the resolution should include the full traffic analysis.

"If they're being bused, there are no kids to count," Mayor Allan Thompson pointed out.

DeBoer likened it to a catch-22.

?You need kids to do the study,? he observed.