

Burlington accused of buckling under

Jason Misner, Special to the Review

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Despite Burlington councillor Rick Craven's suggestion that City Hall is "buckling under" to Waterdown's growth needs, Burlington council has approved a plan to widen a section of Waterdown Road to as many as four lanes.

Craven was hoping councillors might change their vote. However, other than ruffling the feathers of some politicians who took exception to the notion, Burlington is bending to Hamilton's needs, a majority of council voted last week to widen the roadway.

After more than a year of community angst and uncertainty, politicians passed a controversial committee recommendation to widen part of Waterdown Road to three lanes, on a bed of pavement wide enough to accommodate as many as four lanes. Also, King Road will be expanded to two lanes through the Niagara Escarpment crossing to handle increased traffic volume.

The estimated cost of the project is \$26 to \$28 million -- more than double what the amount originally proposed -- and is supposed to be paid almost entirely by Hamilton through development charges.

There's no timeframe for when construction would start.

Scores of residents who live on or near Waterdown Road have been waiting anxiously to see what politicians would do. The road they live on is expected to see a significant increase in traffic due to development in the south Waterdown community. Plans call for 6,500 homes, doubling the population over the next two decades or so.

City of Burlington staff have long said four lanes are needed to handle what appears to be an inevitable flow of traffic.

Craven told council that neighbours aren't fooled by a three-lane-first option. "They know four lanes of pavement is four lanes..." he said.

Councillor John Taylor took umbrage with Craven's assertion that Burlington is "buckling under" to Hamilton growth issues.

"I don't agree with that at all," Taylor said, stressing Brant Street, which in his ward, is at capacity and facing major traffic congestion as a result.

Tom Muir of Burlington, opposed to expanding the road, chastised councillors for considering creating a "four-lane QEW-style platform" to "benefit" Hamilton's interests.

"I don't want a nickel of my taxes going to Hamilton," Muir said.

A cost-sharing arrangement for the project is still very much up in the air. It's been suggested Hamilton would pay 95 per cent of the costs, but such an agreement has not been formalized.

Craven has said Burlington should not be dictated what to do because it's Hamilton's growth driving the need for more lanes. However, Hamilton Councillor Margaret McCarthy doesn't see a 95-5 split happening. She has said Burlington has precipitated the need for an expanded Waterdown Road based on encouraging expansion of the GO train station in Aldershot, the Waterdown/403 interchange and its desire to open 300 acres of employment lands west of King Road.