

Waterdown Growth Gives Burlington Pain
Joan Little
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Burlington will suffer as the result of a 2002 Ontario cabinet decision allowing Waterdown to virtually double its population, adding about 6,500 new homes.

Two thousand of the homes will be in the northwest; 1,000 east of Waterdown, north of Dundas Street; and 3,500 south of Dundas, west of Kerns Road. The issue for Burlington is all those new residents commuting through Burlington to the QEW, to a large extent on Waterdown Road.

Burlington staff presented council this month with preliminary design options (Phase 3) of the environmental assessment (EA) for the Waterdown/Aldershot Transportation Master Plan, but nothing has been approved yet.

A bit of history:

In 2004, Hamilton chose Dillon Consulting to advise on north-south and east-west traffic routes. Phase 2 of the EA recommended expanding Waterdown Road to four lanes. Phases 3 and 4 (detailed design of both routes) were expected to cost \$542,000, but are now expected to be \$966,400. There was a cost-sharing agreement on the studies among the partners -- Hamilton (75 per cent), Burlington (15 per cent) and Halton (10 per cent).

In March 2006, Hamilton supported the four-lane plan for Waterdown Road.

In April, Burlington decided to investigate a three-lane option with bike lanes and minor improvements to King Road. That took about a year, costing about \$50,000. The recommendation was the same -- only four lanes on Waterdown Road could handle the volume.

Then, in July 2007, council supported Mayor Cam Jackson's suggestion Dillon investigate yet another option, on which he had consulted Waterdown Road residents. (More delay and cost).

He wanted a more environmentally sensitive parkway design, three lanes on a four-lane platform, with planted medians, grass boulevards, with an off-road multi-use pathway on one side, plus an expansion of capacity on the extremely narrow King Road.

Burlington believes Hamilton should pay about 95 per cent of the construction cost because Waterdown (part of Hamilton) development creates the need for road expansions.

No price tags are available for the mayor's gold-plated version, which will cost substantially more than normal construction, with its planted medians and likely even a round-about at Flatt Road. Before the Cadillac version, estimates for both roads totalled more than \$25 million.

The proposed Waterdown Road shifts 30 to 40 metres west of the present road just north of

Flatt Road, away from 13 homes on the east side. Only vacant development land and three homes require expropriation.

Hamilton, understandably, wants Burlington to pay \$124,902 more for study cost escalation it says Burlington caused by delays. And will Hamilton agree to fund a gold-plated road? The design is attractive, but when the three lanes have to be expanded to four the planted medians will have to be torn out, the road repaved and repainted. Meanwhile, Burlington council says it's worried about its capital budget needs.

Jackson was uncharacteristically silent during discussion of his proposal.

Councillor Carol D'Amelio wanted examples of rural roads with similar treatment. Staff couldn't think of any.

Councillor John Taylor noted this was now an urban road, eliciting the information that neither the Niagara Escarpment Commission nor Conservation Halton had been consulted yet about King Road, because the consultant's report was so recently received. Both agencies had adamantly opposed blasting the escarpment and going through the environmentally sensitive areas above it. (The latest proposed widening requires a five-metre cut into the escarpment.)

Councillors criticized the proposed 15.6-metre pavement width on Waterdown Road (which excludes adjacent sidewalks). They had specified 14.2 metres. On-road bike lanes replaced the multi-purpose pathway, and staff confirmed residents are unhappy with the width increase

Councillor Rick Craven asked if lane width could be reduced, but there is a standard, and heavy traffic and the many curves would make narrower lanes unsafe.

Jack Dennison said: "This is way beyond standard design -- an urban highway -- and taxpayers in my ward won't want to pay for that standard. We'll get our butts kicked at public meetings!"

Final detailed designs will follow.

Early in 2009, council will decide whether to close the parallel Kerns Road at the escarpment, a ludicrous idea when there are so few north-south roads as well as a large new city park on Kerns above the escarpment. Surely, reason will prevail and other means will be used to prevent cut-through traffic.

Freelance columnist Joan Little is a former Burlington alderman and Halton councillor, and a member and former chair of the Niagara Escarpment Commission.