

FLAMBOROUGH REVIEW

Burlington okays road plan

Jason Misner, Special to the Review

Published on Jul 06, 2007

Michael Staresinic says he feels "betrayed" now that the City of Burlington has voted to expand a three-kilometre section of rural Waterdown Road to as many as four lanes, to address a projected population boom in Waterdown.

"Something from each resident on that road has been taken from them..." he said, after he appealed to politicians, with a handful of other Waterdown Road residents, to stop four lanes. "The only animal I've seen flip-flop more often is a salmon on a fishing crawler. Hamilton got what it wanted."

A majority of the city's community development committee passed a motion by councillor John Taylor that calls initially for the construction of three lanes on a foundation of pavement wide enough for four lanes.

The fourth lane would be built based on how much development has occurred through OPA 28 in Waterdown. Approved by the Ontario Cabinet in 2002, it calls for the construction of 6,500 homes, which would eventually double the population of the community.

City staff has long said Burlington should expand Waterdown Road to four lanes, which could be built as early as 2018.

In addition, the committee voted that King Road be expanded to two lanes through the Niagara Escarpment crossing to handle the traffic volume.

The city will also look at the possibility of making two of the three lanes on Waterdown Road one-way traffic in the morning and afternoon traffic peak times as an alternative to adding a fourth lane. Electronic signage would be required to alert drivers to the change in traffic direction.

The total price tag would be approximately \$26-28 million, depending on what option is chosen - roughly \$18 million to widen Waterdown Road to four lanes, \$7.3 million for work on King Road and \$1.8 million to convert two lanes on Waterdown Road to accommodate same-way traffic at peak times.

The new cost is \$10-million to \$12-million higher than what had been previously presented to Burlington councillors. Part of the price inflation is due to the city's \$7.3-million proposal to make the narrow Niagara Escarpment crossing on King Road two lanes rather than installing a streetlight to control traffic flow and other improvements, at a cost of \$2 million.

Meanwhile, the city has said Hamilton would pay 95 per cent of the cost of the project, but Flamborough councillor Margaret McCarthy said the breakdown of cost sharing is still very much up in the air.

In fact, Hamilton City Manager Glen Peace sent a letter on June 6 to Burlington, stressing that four lanes is the preferred option. Even if four lanes are approved and built, he wrote that development in the area attributed to this city "would be factored into any final agreement" when it comes to sharing costs.

Taylor told the committee his motion is a "viable solution" that serves "the best interests of all citizens." He has expressed worry that already-crowded Brant Street - part of his ward - will face further constraints based on impending Waterdown growth.

"Growth happens, people come and you have to improve the roadways," he said.

This was the third time the controversial issue of widening Waterdown Road had been before Burlington councillors for a vote in the last 15 months. The previous two times, council was hesitant to vote for any recommendation that allowed for four lanes.

In March, Cam Jackson put forward an option of building Waterdown Road to three lanes only, with traffic-calming features like islands and bike paths.

Taylor said that, under the approved committee motion, components of Jackson's calming features would be incorporated into the design.

Having questioned staff and consultants about the projected traffic numbers, Mayor Jackson said, "I'm not convinced we're going to need four lanes in the future."

Aldershot councillor Rick Craven is upset by his colleagues' decision, which was slated to be ratified by city council July 3. He was the committee's lone dissenting vote. He's convinced the current two-lane Waterdown Road will be doubled.

"The people of Aldershot are pretty smart - they can't be fooled," he said after the meeting. "Four lanes of pavement are four lanes of pavement no matter how you paint it."

Burlington still faces a number of challenges before road work ever gets started, notably a cost-sharing plan with Hamilton and potential opposition from Conservation Halton and the Niagara Escarpment Commission to expanding King Road.

The suggestion has been that Hamilton would cover 95 per cent of the cost through development charges, while the remaining five per cent would be covered by Burlington. It has budgeted its \$655,000 share in 2011.

McCarthy said she's pleased a four-lane platform has been approved by politicians. She said it shows that local politicians recognize that four lanes is possibly needed.

"That sounds reasonable to me as long as we're not providing a false sense of security to residents," she said.

The issue of cost sharing, however, still needs to be negotiated, which could be a tough process, she said. McCarthy doesn't see Hamilton agreeing to a 95-5 split because Burlington is also contributing to the traffic congestion on Waterdown Road.

They "encouraged" the expansion of the GO Train station in Aldershot and the Waterdown/403 interchange, plus the city wants to open 300 acres of employment lands west of King Road, she said. "The decisions they've made have put tremendous pressure on Waterdown Road so to suggest the cost sharing should be 95 per cent (that) Hamilton (pays) is a challenge I would make," she said, not offering a share split suggestion.

The Niagara Escarpment Commission (NEC) and Conservation Halton have said they support widening Waterdown Road to four lanes and are hesitant to see major work carried out on King Road. In letters presented to the committee, both bodies reiterated their concerns about a major reconfiguration of King Road. However, they said they don't know the full effect of two lanes and are willing to see those details in later parts of the study before committing to a decision. The NEC said it must issue a development permit before any work is done on King Road.