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Tuesday, September 14, 2010

Deputation to Council re: Report No. P.W. 10-126 – Harvest Glen Phase 2 Sidewalk Installation

My name is Gordon Mason and I am a community representative with Norfolk Pathways for People. Norfolk Pathways for People is a citizen group that focuses on:

- Advocating for new and improved trails and pathways in Norfolk County.
- Building a community that supports walking and cycling as a mode of transportation.
- Promoting the safe use of local trails and pathways.

Trails and pathways include sidewalks.

Pathways for People supports the Public Works and Environmental Services report regarding the Harvest Glen Phase 2 Sidewalk Installation.

The work that we do supports a walkable community.

Walkable communities are an important aspect of a healthy and vibrant community. To encourage citizens to rely on their cars less and choose walking more often, the environment in which they live, work, learn and play must support walking as a form of everyday transportation.

The availability of continuous sidewalks is a key component in walkable communities. A walkable community also has street lighting, and a variety of shops, services, parks, schools, and workplaces within walking distance of homes. In addition, it is a community where the walking routes are safe, direct, comfortable, and convenient for all pedestrians.

There are many benefits of building and sustaining a community that supports walking as a primary mode of transportation. They include:

Health:

Reducing the health risks such as obesity, diabetes and heart disease currently faced in our communities.

Environment:

Replacing short distance auto trips that damage the environment by impacting air and water quality.

Safety:

Reducing road congestion and improving safety by calming auto traffic and reducing maintenance costs. This provides an environment in which people feel safe and comfortable walking and increases community safety for all.

Accessibility & Equity:

Walking is a free and direct means of accessing local goods, services, community amenities and allows children and youth, and people with specific medical conditions, to travel independently.

Society:

Promoting community cohesion and a heightened sense of place. Discouraging street crime by increasing pedestrian and cycling traffic. Reintroducing residents to the street to enhance their awareness of the environment.

Economy:

Reducing health care costs by increasing the health of residents. Improving access to employment, education & social services.

Community Cohesion and Vitality:

A pedestrian-friendly environment encourages and facilitates social interaction and local economic vitality.

Norfolk County Official Plan, Section 8 Networks and Infrastructure, states that bicycle and pedestrian trails and paths contribute to healthy communities. Section 8.3a states the County shall work towards providing bicycle and pedestrian paths, separated from the roadway, on existing and proposed roads, on abandoned rail corridors, on utility corridors, and within parks and open spaces, as appropriate.

Harvest Glen is a growing neighbourhood nestled between two busy schools, West Lynn Public School and Holy Trinity. Students need a safe way to get to school.

As indicated in the staff report, sidewalk installation is part of the original subdivision plan. In many cases, residents did not ask to see the overall subdivision plan when buying their homes. Should the county be brought to task for any third party misinformation to prospective buyers? Should the opposition of sidewalks by current residents dictate what the community will look like for future residents?

The setback from the street, and proposed location for sidewalk, is county property and therefore, public property. It should be available for safe use by all residents and visitors to the area. The most economical and feasible time to do this sidewalk installation is now, when the developer and his contractor are prepared to do so.

There are sidewalk gaps all over Norfolk County. But, slowly, these gaps will be filled over time. Sidewalks provide a safe place for people of all ages to walk, for children to play and for neighbours to meet and chat. Sidewalks aren't just for adjacent landowners. They are for all residents in the surrounding area. Harvest Glen may be a low vehicle traffic area, but we all know it only takes one vehicle to injure a pedestrian, perhaps fatally.

For these reasons, and many more, Norfolk Pathways for People encourages Council to support the installation of sidewalks on Driftwood Avenue and Ashbury Lane, as per Report No. P.W. 10-126. You can't put a price on the health and safety of our citizens and our community.

Thank you for your time.

Respectfully submitted by,

Gordon Mason



Health Action is funded by the Ministry of Health Promotion and supported by the Haldimand-Norfolk Health Unit. Health Action partners with 30 individuals and organizations, and promotes integration, communication and support environments that encourage people in our communities to live healthy lives.