

Expos Nov 17/09

No money, support for doomed extension

Expositor Staff

Oak Park Road won't be extended south across the Grand River to Colborne Street West any time soon, if ever. City council moved to scrap plans to proceed with an environmental assessment of the affected area, after hearing from concerned citizens. Three came forward at Monday's meeting and many others voiced concerns at a public forum last month.

In a recorded vote, only Coun. Vince Bucci voted in favour of going ahead with the environmental assessment, the cost of which was estimated by staff at \$1 million, \$300,000 of which was to be transferred from another project.

None of the other councillors, nor Mayor Mike Hancock, said they saw a need for the extension, let alone the assessment.

First off the mark was Coun. Mark Littell.

"We've heard from the neighbourhood, we've heard from the community that we don't want it, and we don't have

the money at this time," he said.

Coun. John Sless then confirmed with staff that the project in question wasn't even scheduled for construction until 2027. He wondered aloud why there was such an urgency to fund the environmental report, especially considering "there was not a lot of support" for it at public meetings.

It may be long-term planning to do it now, "but I don't think it's prudent planning."

Coun. Marguerite Ceschi-Smith also noted the lack of public support for the extension.

"This is a plan that is 30 to 40 years old," she reminded, in voicing her disapproval. "It is the BSAR plan."

The BSAR, or Brant Southern Access Road, was conceived as a sweeping link of highways connecting the south end of Brantford to the north end, across the Grand River. Parts of the BSAR have been built, including the crucial Newport extension, which connects Eagle Place to downtown, but other parts of the plan have been essentially abandoned, including a link through the Glebe lands, which are owned by Six Nations.

In fact, partial funding for the Oak Park Environmental Assessment was

supposed to come from money set aside for a similar assessment to facilitate the link through the Glebe lands.

"In view of the pace of consultations with Six Nations," a staff report indicated, "it is unlikely that the missing link of the Veterans Memorial Parkway (formerly BSAR) between Market Street and Colborne Street/Wayne Gretzky Parkway will be completed in the foreseeable future."

The logic in shifting those funds to the longer-term project "is flawed," added Coun. Jennifer Kinneman; negotiations with Six Nations have failed, "so let's shift it over to a project that won't be needed until 2027 to 2031."

Bucci had noted that "there are people in West Brant who have to get to Highway 403," adding that "to say this is not needed is totally inappropriate."

Kinneman wasn't so sure of that, and said council shouldn't be in a rush to back a plan that essentially takes people out of the city.

"I think we should be encouraging people from West Brant to come into our downtown."

Coun. Greg Martin then commended his colleagues for not just accepting a plan at face value but questioning its

value. ^A

"This is refreshing," Martin said, "because they're actually listening" to what their constituents have to say.

Coun. Richard Carpenter noted that the extension plan never really was spelled out for council when it was looking at the master transportation plan, and now that its nature has become clearer, it's easier to see there is no need for it.

The parts of the BSAR that were never built are not missed, he added.

"We don't need the BSAR any more," he said. People need access into the city, not out of it, he added, "and we need to do that without destroying neighbourhoods."

Coun. Dan McCreary had a slightly different take in questioning the need for the extension.

"I don't know why we would want to do this, I really don't," he said. "I think we've had enough of Toronto consultants and far too little of people who live in our neighbourhoods."

Hancock added that he was opposed for "pragmatic reasons," the estimated \$35 million to \$40 million costs "for a road that can't possibly be done."

"We just don't have the money for the foreseeable future."



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