

Traffic study stirs the pot with speeding concerns

By Mark Pavilons

A seemingly routine traffic study stirred the proverbial hornets' nest at King council recently.

The ward-by-ward study results for 2015-2016 were presented to council, along with several recommendations.

Extensive data collection was done through 2015 and 2016, to ascertain areas of concern. In the staff report, they contend "only the physical environment will have a marked effect on the speeds that drivers choose to drive at. Data has shown that lowering speeds below the 85th percentile speed do not decrease speeds and frequency of accidents."

Staff recommend upping the limit on several roads to 80 km-h. These include the 15th, 16th and 17th Sideroads, as well as the 8th Concession.

Councillors took some issues with the recommendations. Staff do plan to conduct ongoing speed studies over the fall and into the spring. Staff will bring back another report with specific recommendations after the second study.

A 16th Sideroad resident questioned the accuracy of the speed studies on this road, which has had several serious crashes over the years. The road is frequented by walkers and cyclists and presents some obvious hazards, not the least of which are bad sightlines in several locations. She urged council to retain the 60 km-h limit.

Councillor Debbie Schaefer also questioned why staff would recommend the increase, asking for other speed reduction options.

Mike Cole did not it's an ongoing, fluid study and nothing is cast in stone.

Councillor David Boyd also wanted staff to look at commuter shortcuts through subdivision streets. He wants to curb this practice and discourage motorists from using residential areas as a bypass.

Councillor Cleve Mortelliti also expressed concerns about increasing the speed on the 16th. He pointed out that once rural gravel roads are paved, they often turn into "raceways." He does not support increasing the speeds. He observed, when speeds are upped to 80 km-h, it changes the designation and classification of the road, with impacts on maintenance and works crews response.

Mortelliti pointed out that several years council entertained the suggestion of a "blanket speed limit" across the municipality, pegged at 60 km-h. He suggested this be revisited in the future.

CAO Susan Plamondon noted any formal recommendations will return to council for approval. "This meeting was to obtain feedback, concerns and "provoke comment," which is did in spades. She added work still needs to be done on the traffic recommendations.

Councillor Bill Cober asked staff to share the data and speeding concerns with York Regional Police, whose presence will send a message to residents. He did note that many speeders tend to be the residents of the area.

"It's our responsibility to drive the speed limit in our own community," he stressed. "Slow down; that's the solution." He argued that speed humps are not necessary, motorists simply have to get the message and abide by the rules. "This is a social issue, not an infrastructure issue," he contended.

Mayor Steve Pellegrini said speed designations should be backed by data, and not simply dictated by political or social needs. He cautioned councillors on setting arbitrarily low limits. People drive at speeds that are comfortable to them, and won't necessarily speed if limits are raised. He cited a speed change on BC highways, from 100 to 120 km-h and the average speed of drivers did not go up.

He said he's in favour of a consistent approach across the municipality.

He pointed out the police can't be expected to sit and wait for speeders and they need analytical data to set their strategy.