

Roundabout draws mixed reaction at open house

By Mark Pavilons

Public reaction to the planned roundabout in King Township seems to be mixed.

Despite efforts to



spouse the virtues of the efficacy of King's first roundabout, it comes as little consolation for the impacted property owners.

Hosted by York Region staff and a team of consultants, the open house at Kettleby Public School drew an impressive crowd of close to 100 residents who got to see video and artist renderings of King's newest traffic control measure.

Cynthia Martin, roads project manager at York Region, said the region endorsed roundabouts back in 2008 as the preferred option for intersection improvements. Each location is scrutinized and if a roundabout isn't possible, 'we don't do it,' she said.

This particular intersection in King - Lloydtown-Aurora Road and Keele Street - meets the criteria. The intersection sees a lot of traffic volume and has been the scene of many accidents.

York Region approved this locale, as well as others in the region, in 2012 and design work began.

Martin said the property owners were approached and staff worked at refining the details of the roundabout. One of the inherent problems with this stretch of road is there are no shoulders and a very narrow right of way.

Hopes are construction can begin in 2015. If it starts early enough in the season, it can be completed that year, but if not, it will drag into 2016. Martin said the estimated construction costs for this roundabout are \$3 million.

The Region is looking at this measure as an 'entrance' to Kettleby, making motorists aware they're entering a village, signalling a change and need to slow down. Promoting safe and efficient traffic flow is the fundamental purpose of a roundabout.

At this point the Region is only working on the inside track, but there are provisions for adding lanes in the future. But the current design will be fine through 2031, Martin said.

The Region is currently building the first roundabout, on the York-Durham Line south of Stouffville.

Local politicians were on hand at the open house to see the drawings and speak with residents. King council approved the concept of roundabouts several years ago.

Mayor Steve Pellegrini noted it's hard to turn away millions of York Region dollars spent to improve traffic in King. It's money well spent to make things better. He also said roundabouts are more environmentally friendly than signalled intersections because vehicles aren't stopping or idling.

Councillor Peter Grandilli said the project is 'excellent,' adding drivers need to be educated.

Also on hand to learn more were Councillors Cleve Mortelliti and Avia Eek.

Some residents were not convinced this is the way to go.

Joyce Harrison, whose land at the northwest corner of the intersection will be affected the most, said a roundabout may work in some areas with few vehicles, but not on the busy Lloydtown-Aurora Road. The site, at the bottom of the hill, is not ideal.

Neighbour Jamie Puopolo, who's leading the opposition to the plan, said the Region is contemplating widening the road to four lanes in the future and they need to be more transparent through this process. The lands through the northwest corner of the intersection contain mature wooded areas that will likely be reduced.

'Generally we were very disappointed with the open house as the format did not provide local residents an opportunity to have any input on this project, many of our questions and concerns remain unanswered,' Puopolo said. 'The open house simply means that York Region has met their legal requirement to inform the public at the bare minimum. Many local residents were hoping to speak to our ward councillor, however, she was not there.'

Puopolo also thought York Region staff were not clearly identified and several residents actually came up to her asking if she could answer their questions, simply because they noticed her clipboard.

?After viewing the planned roundabout many residents came to sign my petition. Many residents still do not like it nor want it here. We will keep working on the petition to stop the roundabout in the hopes that someone will hear our collective voice.?

One Keele Street resident said he was ?mystified? by this design. He's concerned with this plan and he foresees some ?serious issues??with the effects of ice and snow in the winter on drivers.

Another resident, a native of Germany, said it's been working well for years in Europe. With their large traffic volumes it has the effect of keeping the traffic flowing, instead of stopping it.

Introduced in the UK, roundabouts are common throughout Europe and are becoming more so in North America. They've been endorsed by the U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration for years, noting they reduce accidents by 35%; fatalities by 90% and virtually eliminate head-on and high-speed collisions.

It's argued that roundabouts are less costly in the long run than signals, which require ongoing maintenance. Unlike stop lights, a roundabout is working 100% of the time, doing its job.

In Ontario, vehicles travel counterclockwise around a central island. Traffic entering the roundabout must yield to circulating traffic. Because approaching traffic only has to yield to vehicles already circulating in a roundabout, movement is often without delay. It has been shown that a roundabout can move traffic through an intersection at a much higher rate than traditional intersection controls.