

Township presents 'Walking School Bus'?

By Mark Pavilons

King Township is trying to safeguard the safety of Schomberg students through its new 'Walking School Bus' program.

Parents whose little ones attend St. Patrick's School expressed concern about their safety, since a change to board policy has meant students have to walk to the school, along Western and Main Streets, neither of which are safe, parents contend.

A committee of parents was formed and they've been working diligently, lobbying the board and municipality.

Some 60 children who attend St. Patrick's, from JK to Grade 8, are no longer eligible to ride the bus. Parents believe Western can be dangerous given its winding nature and lack of sidewalks. The board has suggested kids use Main Street, but parents don't like the idea of the little ones walking through a high-traffic commercial area.

The parents believe a tangible, long-term solution is the installation of sidewalks on Western, something that has caused mixed reaction among existing homeowners.

As well, building sidewalks is not a priority for King Township.

The Township has agreed to add a crossing guard at Main Street and Western Avenue for the remainder of the 2014-15 school year.

Staff have come up with an innovative 'Walking School Bus' initiative as a pilot project.

According to a report by Chris Fasciano, director of Parks, Recreation and Culture, this first-time program assists students who walk to school.

It's an organized walking group designed to gather in one area of the subdivision and accompany students to and from school, along a route approved by the school board and Township staff.

Fasciano noted since it's brand new, there hasn't been much in the way of feedback to evaluate the program's effectiveness.

Cost for crossing guards are covered through the annual operating budget and each additional guard costs roughly \$8,000 annually.

The cost of the Walking School Bus program on a permanent basis would be on par, Fasciano said.