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Chebucto Community Council
March 7, 2011

TO: Chair and Members of Chebucto Community Council

SUBMITTED BY: Ken Reashor, P.Eng., Director of Transportation and Public Works

DATE: January 5, 2011

SUBJECT: Resident Traffic and Safety Concerns - Fairmount Subdivision

INFORMATION REPORT

ORIGIN

Item 10.2.1 raised at the April 12, 2010 meeting of Chebucto Community Council.

MOVED BY Councillor Mosher, seconded by Councillor Adams that Chebucto Community Council request a report regarding short cutting, speeding and traffic calming in the Fairmount Subdivision. MOTION PUT AND PASSED.

BACKGROUND

The minutes of the April 12, 2010 meeting of Chebucto Community Council show the following:

10.2.1 Resident Traffic and Safety Concerns - Fairmount Subdivision – Councillor Mosher
Councillor Mosher advised that she had been working with staff regarding speeding issues in the Fairmount Subdivision; noting that there was also a concern that drivers were using the area as a short cut to avoid the Armdale Rotary.

Councillor Mosher indicated, for the record, that the Chain of Lake Trail would be going through the Fairmount Subdivision; noting that this area could be used as a pilot project for designated bike lanes in subdivisions. She also stated that there were few sidewalks in the Subdivision and that the area was not designed for the traffic volume it was now receiving. In closing, she advised that she intended to have the study available to residents in the Subdivision.

DISCUSSION

Speeding

Speeds were measured using automated traffic recorder equipment on Brook Street (approximately at house numbers 144 and 146) and on Arlington Avenue (approximately at house numbers 14 and 16), both locations where drivers appeared to be travelling the fastest. On Brook Street the average speed was 48 kph with an 85th percentile speed[1] of 57 kph while on Arlington Street the average speed was 46 kph with an 85th percentile speed of 55 kph. These speeds are similar to speeds in most residential areas of Halifax Regional Municipality and do not indicate any particular problem given the roadway design and visibility in the Fairmount Subdivision area.

Short-Cutting

Some residents allege there is a high volume of drivers short-cutting through the area. This seems unlikely because the standard intended routes offer a shorter travel time at most times of the day. Sometimes morning peak period congestion at the Armdale Roundabout would make driving through Fairmount from St. Margaret's Bay Road to Joseph Howe Drive a tempting alternative, but posting of no-left-turn regulations to prevent this unwanted behaviour has been successful. That these measures have worked is shown by the relatively low volume of traffic on Crown Drive; particularly during the morning rush period.

School Area Signs

[1] The 85th percentile speed is the speed that 85 percent of drivers do not exceed. It is commonly used in measuring speeds of motor vehicle traffic to gauge the average driver's perception of a safe and reasonable speed. This criterion has been has been found to be the most satisfactory method of calculating reasonable speeds and now has been used for many years in a wide variety of countries.

Some residents have questioned whether there are enough school area signs in the subdivision. School area signs are reserved for installation on streets abutting the school property. Children walk to school on many streets and drivers should be aware of pedestrian traffic at any time. The school area signs call special attention to the higher density of child pedestrians in the immediate vicinity of school buildings.

The two schools' property extends along Downs Avenue from Milsom Street to Winter Street. There are school area signs on Milsom Street at White Glove Terrace for north bound vehicle traffic and just south of Doull Avenue for south bound vehicle traffic. There is also a school area sign on Downs Avenue east of Winter Street for west bound vehicle traffic and on Winter Street just north of Downs Avenue for south bound vehicle traffic. The school area signs are correctly located according to provincial criteria.

Playground Warning Signs

Some residents also questioned if there were enough playground-ahead signs to cover the playground at the Springvale School property. There are warning playground-ahead signs on Milsom Street just south of Downs Avenue for north bound vehicle traffic, on Downs Avenue just east of Milsom Street for east bound vehicle traffic, and on Downs Avenue at Winter Street for west bound vehicle traffic. The warning playground-ahead sign on Downs has been relocated to Milsom facing south bound traffic.

Areas on Roadways Hidden to Approaching Drivers

One resident mentioned his impression that there are areas on Arlington Avenue, Piers Avenue and Doull Avenue where a driver's view of a pedestrian or anything else on the roadway (such as a car coming out of a driveway) was restricted to be less than the normal distance. This idea was checked out and indeed there are areas as suggested. We actually found two such areas on Piers Avenue. The appropriate sign is the "blind crest" sign. A work order has been issued for installation of four sign bases and posts and eight signs (four signs can go on utility poles).

All-way Stop Signs

A couple of residents suggested the intersection of Doull Avenue and Winter Street should have all-way stop signs posted. All-way stop control may be approved at intersections carrying a significant and relatively equal amount of traffic on each roadway. The national warrant under the Canadian Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices indicates that a significant amount of traffic would be an average of 200 vehicles per hour over the eight highest volume hours of the day. Relatively equal is defined as a ratio of the volume on the intersecting streets not exceeding 2:1. Where the volume warrant is not met, all-way stop control may also be considered for approval at locations where there is an average of at least 5 reported collisions per year over a 5 year period deemed preventable by all-way stop control. Neither the traffic volume warrant nor the collision warrants were satisfied at the intersection of Doull Avenue and Winter Street.

On-Street Painted Bicycle and Walking Lanes

One resident suggested that the lack of sidewalks through almost all of the original Fairmount Subdivision is a problem for walkers. He also suggested that bicycle lanes would increase bicycle ridership in the neighbourhood. Construction of sidewalks on existing streets is limited by the available budget money. What sidewalks are to be constructed are chosen based on a set of criteria that account for the volumes of pedestrians (including an adjustment allowance for seniors and children) and the volume of motor vehicle traffic. Only a few sidewalks are possible to be done each year and there is a waiting list of over 200 streets where the criteria are already satisfied. The criteria would not be satisfied in Fairmount.

As an alternative the resident suggested marking with a line painted on the street a pedestrian and bicycle lane. Similar markings are used in many locations in urban areas of Japan. Another alternative is the sort of bicycle lanes used in some areas of Montreal which have a narrow concrete median with markers that separate a two-way bicycle lanes facility from the rest of the paved street.

The Montreal two-way bicycle lanes with median are only provided on high traffic bicycle areas and only on streets much wider than most in Halifax Regional Municipality. Thus they are not a practical solution for the Fairmount area. Even in Montreal such bike lanes are not without problems, particularly at intersections and where driveways are located. (Most of the Montreal locations have few driveways abutting the bike lanes.)

This writer was not aware of the painted pedestrian walkways used in Japan and so some research was done. The lanes are used only on very narrow roadways in dense areas of major Japanese cities. These areas have dwellings or other buildings right at the edge of the street so there is no front lawns to provide for more visibility. The roads have a maximum width of only about 5 metres and carry two-way traffic. Drivers travel quite slowly on these narrow roads because of the restricted width. In Japan parking for privately-owned motor vehicles is scarce and expensive, and the pedestrian lanes seem intended more as a no-parking restriction (which allows for both foot and two-way motor vehicle traffic) than as a pedestrian amenity.

The roadways in the Fairmount subdivision are 9 metres wide and allow for normal motor vehicle operating speeds in the vicinity of 50 kph, far higher than the speeds on the narrow Japanese back lanes. A painted pedestrian and bicycle area would provide almost no protection for a person on foot or on a bicycle other than the chance that drivers might pay some attention to the painted off area. At the same time, would pedestrians and cyclists act with less care thinking the painted lines give them some protection that does not exist?

Traffic and Right of Way Services' opinion is that such painted pedestrian facilities would be more dangerous and provide little benefit to pedestrians.

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

There are no budget implications.

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT POLICIES / BUSINESS PLAN

This report complies with the Municipality's Multi-Year Financial Strategy, the approved Operating, Project and Reserve budgets, policies and procedures regarding withdrawals from the utilization of Project and Operating reserves, as well as any relevant legislation.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Community engagement was not deemed to be necessary in preparation of this report because the report is answering questions provided by the Community Council member for the area, Councillor Mosher. Councillor Mosher and the report author (Alan Taylor) met with one resident to clarify his concerns before the report was composed.

A copy of this report can be obtained online at http://www.halifax.ca/commcoun/cc.html then choose the appropriate Community Council and meeting date, or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 490-4210, or Fax 490-4208.

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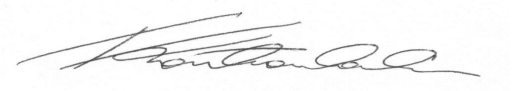

Report Approved by: Taso Koutroulakis, P.Eng., A/Manager of Traffic and Right of Way Services, 490-4816
