Advocates want more trees in city's framework for 'complete streets'

Transportation committee approved plan on Oct. 7

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By Alex Robinson

While transforming some of Ottawa's roads into "complete streets" may have been a good first step, some community advocates want greener streets, too.

The transportation committee approved a report at a meeting on Oct. 7 which lays out the framework for the city's plan to build complete streets. City council updated its transportation master plan in 2013 and included policy supporting the development of complete streets, which make roads accessible to all modes of transportation.

Complete streets have been built or planned in a number of locations in Ottawa, including River Road and Longfields Drive.

The city is currently taking advantage of a scheduled reconstruction of Main Street in Old Ottawa East to transform it into a complete street. Staff said other streets that are not ready to be rebuilt can be made into complete streets with minor changes, such as painted bike lanes. The city recently painted new bike lanes on parts of St. Laurent Boulevard to reach this goal.

The new framework provides a methodology for the continued development of complete streets, but some community groups were dismayed over what they said is a lack of commitment to trees and green infrastructure in the plan.

"We thought there was a glaring omission. There is no mention of the role of trees," said Angela Keller-Herzog, of the Glebe Community Association.

"This is of great concern to us."

Representatives from many community groups spoke overwhelmingly in favour of the plan, but some wanted to see a greater emphasis on making sure complete streets would have green spaces.

"A complete street isn't a complete street unless it's also a green street," Gloucester-Southgate Coun. Diane Deans said at the meeting.

Keller-Herzog said she does not want to slow down the implementation of complete streets, but just wanted to make sure trees are a bigger part of the framework.

One of the examples Keller-Herzog pointed to was that of Churchill Avenue, a street which has been transformed into a complete street with separate bike lanes, but is lacking in trees or vegetation around it.

“The trees are some sort of cosmetic afterthought,” she said.

“This is not working.”

Somerset Coun. Catherine McKenney also pushed for more guidelines concerning trees in the framework to make sure green infrastructure is considered for future complete streets.

“We don’t always consider where we’re going to be putting trees,” she said.

Colin Simpson, a senior project manager with transportation planning, said the framework does include such considerations.

“I’d just like to point out that the implementation strategy before you today does recognize the importance of trees, bioswales and green infrastructure,” he said.