

DATE OF MEETING JUNE 22, 2020

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SUBJECT REALLOCATION OF STREET SPACE

OVERVIEW

Purpose of Report:

The purpose of this report is to provide preliminary information to Council regarding the motion put forward at the Special Council Meeting, held 2020-JUN-08 to review opportunities to reallocate street space, in favour of active transportation and place making.

BACKGROUND

Since a global pandemic and Provincial state of emergency were declared in March 2020, the City of Nanaimo has adapted and expanded many of its services in order to comply with Provincial health orders and recommendations to reduce the spread of Covid-19, including a new program to allow expanded restaurant patios, eliminating parking fees in the Downtown area. The City has also monitored how other communities have responded to the pandemic, and considered which methods could be a good fit for Nanaimo's unique context.

At their Special Council meeting on 2020-JUN-08, Council passed the following motion:

"It was moved and seconded that Council direct Staff to prepare a report with potential options for the re-allocation of roadway space for physically distancing and temporarily using streets for pandemic recovery and response; such items may include pavement to plaza initiatives, slow streets, and pop-up lanes for cycling, rolling and walking."

DISCUSSION

One of the most important measures for reducing the spread of Covid-19 is "physical distancing" (maintaining a distance of at least 2 metres from people that are not part of one's household). Many densely populated cities with congested pedestrian realms and public transit systems have temporarily reallocated road space for active transportation use to support physical distancing. Nanaimo does not face comparable congestion issues, and the Provincial Health Officer has confirmed there is a negligible risk of transmitting the virus when briefly passing another person outdoors, even within 2 metres. However, there are other reasons to consider these types of initiatives at this time, including:

- Addressing perceived risk and anxieties about using public space;
- Experimenting with measures that could have beneficial impacts outside of the pandemic;
- Participating in what could be a global shift in how active transportation amenities and public spaces are created, used, and valued.

Council have directed Staff to provide potential options for the reallocation of roadway space for initiatives such as pavement to plaza, slow streets, and pop-up lanes for cycling, rolling and walking. The National Association of Transportation Officials (NACTO) has published a guide to using streets for pandemic recovery and response. The guide recommends six principles to guide decision making around Covid-19 response (see Attachment A for details). These include:

- Support the most vulnerable people first
- Amplify & support public health guidance
- Safer streets for today and tomorrow
- Support local economies
- Bring communities into the process
- Act now and adapt over time

The City also needs to consider the following:

- Availability of resources
- Priority connection needs
- Existing policy framework

With these principles in mind, and with consideration of recent input from the community, Staff have identified the following potential options for Council's consideration (see Attachment B for area context):

Idea #1: Temporary cycling lanes on Departure Bay Road between Montrose Avenue and Hammond Bay Road

This section of Departure Bay Road has often been identified as a barrier for cyclists to safely access areas of the city south of the Departure Bay area. Staff anticipate a southbound cycling lane could be created by altering street line painting.

Key Considerations:

- Not in current Financial Plan
- Design feasibility would need to be confirmed through further study
- Consultation with the Departure Bay Neighbourhood Association should be carried out
- Residents with frontage on the proposed bike lane should be notified of the proposed project

Idea #2: "Slow Street" on Georgia Avenue from Fifth Street to Eighth Street

Significant investments were recently made into the "Georgia Greenway" which created a multi-use path connection through Harewood Centennial Park. Further interventions on Georgia Avenue may enhance active transportation connections between the two major service centres in Harewood.

Georgia Avenue may be a good candidate for a "slow streets" initiative which would limit usage to local traffic only, and emphasize active transportation priority through awareness building, signage, and barricades to discourage through traffic where appropriate.

Key Considerations:

- Not in current Financial Plan
- Consultation with the Harewood Neighbourhood Association should be carried out
- Consultation with Georgia Avenue Elementary School should be carried out
- Residents with frontage on Georgia Avenue should be notified of the proposed project

Idea #3: Slow streets and/ or “tactical urbanism” interventions on streets and lanes near Haliburton Street

Haliburton Street was identified as a potential location for temporary active transportation infrastructure. Staff were unable to identify desirable short term options for enhancing active transportation infrastructure along Haliburton Street for the reasons listed under “Key Considerations” below. However, there may be opportunities to enhance the active transportation realm on the side streets and lanes that parallel Haliburton Street, by implementing “slow streets”, or by supporting neighbourhood-led/ City supported tactical urbanism initiatives such as art, signage, road painting, plantings etc.

Key Considerations:

- Haliburton Street is partially classified as a Commercial Road, and partially classified as a type of Major Road by the Nanaimo Transportation Master Plan, making it an inappropriate location for a “slow street” initiative that would limit use to local traffic only.
- Haliburton Street currently does not have cycling lanes, but it does have complete sidewalks, including a grassy, treed boulevard on either side of the road, for a total of approximately 4 metres from sidewalk to curb.
- Many residents in this area use on-street parking which could impact the level of community support for reallocating parking spaces on Haliburton Street.
- This neighbourhood has a grid system that provides multiple route choices, and potential locations for temporary interventions.
- Consultation with the South End Community Association would be required to determine if there is interest in community-led tactical urbanism initiatives
- Not in current Financial Plan.

Idea #4 Implement a Neighbourhood Grant Program

There may be an opportunity to support tactical urbanism initiatives within neighbourhoods on an ongoing basis, through a neighbourhood grant program that would empower neighbourhoods to enhance usability and vibrancy within the neighbourhood-level public realm.

Key Considerations:

- Victoria’s Neighbourhood Grant program is an example of what the City of Nanaimo could consider.
- If this is of interest, Staff can carry out more research and develop a program concept for Council’s consideration.
- Development of the program would take a year or more and would require funding through future Financial Plans. |

CONCLUSION

The above ideas are a starting point for Council’s consideration, and Council may wish to add additional ideas to this list. Staff will carry out a detailed feasibility and costing review for each of Council’s preferred ideas, and will present a recommendation to Council at an upcoming Council meeting. It is important to note that none of the above ideas are part of the current Financial Plan, or Staff work plans, so resourcing these projects will require some creativity. |

SUMMARY POINTS

- Staff are staying up to date on provincial recommendations for social distancing and are monitoring success stories from other municipalities with consideration for applicability in Nanaimo.
- This preliminary list of options are based on recent input from the community, and a set of principles recommended by the National Association of Transportation Officials
- Next steps will include evaluating the feasibility of each idea based on design considerations, community interest, availability of funding, and Staff resources.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A – NACTO Principles to Guide COVID-19 Response & Recovery

Attachment B – Context Maps

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