

DATE OF MEETING AUGUST 29, 2022

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SUBJECT BOXWOOD ROAD MULTI-PURPOSE FACILITY

OVERVIEW

Purpose of Report:

To provide Council with an update on the implementation of the Boxwood Multi-purpose Active Mobility Facility on Boxwood Road between Dufferin Crescent and Tulsa Road.

BACKGROUND

The land west of Bowen Road began to develop for industrial use around 1994, as permitted by the “Zoning under Bylaw 1993 No. 4000.” This included a broad mix of businesses ranging from dance/yoga/gymnastics studios to manufacturing or heavy equipment storage and maintenance. At that time, the development of industrial land did not require the construction of sidewalks or cycling facilities, as they were viewed as unnecessary in industrial areas and a financial burden to landowners. These initial parcels were accessed by Tulsa Road and an interim connection through Island Diesel Way.

In 2009, Boxwood Road was extended north to Meredith Road; providing a connection to Northfield Road, and in 2012, Boxwood Road was extended south to Dufferin Crescent. The connection to East Wellington Road was completed in 2018, effectively creating a redundant route to Bowen Road and a bypass to the congested intersection at Bowen Road and Northfield Road. Between 2012 and 2020, traffic on Boxwood Road has increased from approximately 900 vpd (vehicles per day) to almost 5,000 vpd, with the expectation that volumes could exceed 7,000 vpd within the next 10 years.

In 2014, the City adopted the Nanaimo Transportation Master Plan (NTMP) which became the City’s 30-year vision for mobility. Within the plan, walking and cycling were identified as the highest priority forms of mobility and Boxwood Road was identified as the “*Off-Bowen Bikeway*” and was envisioned to be delivered in the short term (NTMP - Map 3). City Plan has maintained this hierarchy of mobility and has also identified Boxwood Road as a Secondary Active Mobility Route; Bowen Road has not been identified as a viable Active Mobility route in City Plan.

NTMP – “Off-Bowen Bikeway Bowen Road is one of the City’s largest transportation corridors with heavy traffic volumes including transit. A diverse range of services and employment are located along the street with future growth and densification anticipated. With a challenging environment for on-street cycling, this proposed route would link a series of streets immediately to the west of Bowen to create a parallel cycling corridor that provides a comfortable cycling environment while remaining close to key destinations along Bowen.”

As development has progressed along Boxwood Road, some property owners have voiced concern over the increasing volume and speed of traffic and the impacts it is having on driveway access, mobility of pedestrians (customers), and cyclists. These concerns were discussed at an Engineering and Public Works Committee meeting in 2018; and resulted in the marking of a yellow centerline to better delineate travel lanes.

The spectrum of land uses within the Boxwood area creates many challenges when dealing with mobility. Increasing traffic and a growing demand for walking and cycling facilities further complicate the matters.

DISCUSSION

In 2020, as the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic were being experienced around the world, many municipalities began exploring opportunities to re-purpose public realm or street space to enable socially distanced public gathering or mobility. As part of this, Council tasked Staff to identify opportunities within the City of Nanaimo to achieve these goals and objectives. In July 2020, Staff provided a report identifying options, which included advancing the Active Mobility connection along Boxwood Road (Attachment A). Council approved the recommendation to replace the parking lane on the west side of Boxwood with a buffered walking shoulder for \$45,000. With approval from Council, Staff began the process of designing and implementing this facility, which began with removing parking from the west side of the road. Like many projects in this period of time, staff/consultant capacity and scarcity of resources has impeded delivery, and as a result, the project was not tendered until the fall of 2021 and construction was not started until the summer of 2022.

Through the design process, Staff looked at the future phases of the corridor (Tulsa to Northfield) and reassessed the options being planned.

- Boxwood – Tulsa to Meredith Cycling in 2022 (project cancelled funds allocated to current project)
- Boxwood – Meredith to Northfield Cycling and Walking (to be constructed with Midtown Gateway)

Through this process, it was determined that if barriers were introduced to the walking shoulder, the facility could expand usage to allow for bidirectional cycling as well, ultimately creating a multi-purpose path more effectively fulfilling the vision of the *Off-Bowen Bikeway*, however this change required additional funds. This process also highlighted the challenges that would be expected with adding a facility on Boxwood Road between Tulsa Road and Meredith Road and so the decision was made to re-allocate funds to enhance the Dufferin to Tulsa section, and direct cyclists around Boxwood between Tulsa and Meredith, where they would then connect with the facilities being constructed as part of the Midtown Gateway Project. The revised project (Dufferin to Tulsa) bid price was \$153,621.

As construction began, five (5) property owners expressed objections to the change, citing that they had not been consulted and that it was impacting their business operations. Staff have since worked with each business to amend the design to accommodate operational needs while retaining the intent of providing a protected cycling facility through the area as outlined in policy documents. As of 2022-AUG-10, Staff have received confirmation from all but one of the

businesses, that the changes now satisfy their operational needs; however, several still object to the project for other reasons.

During the conversations with the businesses, it was also pointed out that adding a trail to the construction of the “MidTown Water Supply” watermain (which goes between the properties and the Nanaimo Parkway) would be more desirable, as it bypasses all of the accesses. The replacement of this watermain was not anticipated when the 2020 Report was prepared and the alignment for this watermain was confirmed less than a year ago. That said, Staff did consider the opportunity of adding a hard surface over the watermain to create another Active Mobility route, however it was believed that the cost would be between \$1 million and \$1.5 million. This option also doesn’t address the concerns about direct pedestrian or cyclist access to the retail or service-oriented businesses in the area.

There is also the potential to construct a sidewalk along the west side of Boxwood Road as well; however, between the relocation of utility poles, potential acquisition of land, and the restoration of custom landscaping, it is estimated that this work would also approach \$1 million and would not address the intent of providing a cycling connection across the west edge of Central Nanaimo.

CONCLUSION

The Nanaimo Transportation Master Plan and City Plan prioritize walking and biking as the highest priority forms of mobility within the City. These policy documents also highlight the need to have an Active Mobility connection along the west side of Central Nanaimo, to compliment the E&N Trail along the east side. The varied needs of the business within the Boxwood industrial area will continue to compete, however the need for walking and cycling through or to the area will remain.

The Multi-purpose Active Mobility facility that is being constructed on Boxwood is a low cost project that was envisioned to be an expedited interim treatment to support walking and biking until a more formal/final product could be funded. Retrofit projects often have challenges integrating into an existing system and while some adjustments to the initial design were necessary to accommodate movements of the largest vehicles at specific businesses, Staff have worked with each, to ensure they can continue to operate as they did prior to construction.

Noting that this is an interim treatment, future opportunities are being considered to create a more formal facility to support the goals and targets within City Plan and have considered alternative routes, such as a trail over the watermain and/or a sidewalk along the west side of Boxwood Road. These would both be transformative projects; however, the costs far exceed the funds that are currently available and these projects could be considered as future priorities. Should these projects move forward, there may be an opportunity to return parking to the west side of Boxwood Road, as it was in 2019. |

SUMMARY POINTS

- The Boxwood industrial area is envisioned to shift from Industrial to Light Industrial use over time, which will lessen heavy vehicle activity and increase service/retail space.
- Boxwood Road is identified in multiple policy documents as a key Active Mobility Route along the west side of Central Nanaimo.
- Staff have worked with affected businesses to address access management issues resulting from the creation of a Multi-purpose Path.
- Alternative options have been considered; however, they are costly and do not achieve the same degree of connectivity and accessibility.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A – Roadway Reallocation Options Report

Attachment B – Project Location Plan |

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