

Mono council to poll the public on bridge's future

By **JAMES MATTHEWS, LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER**

Mono's Department of Public Works hopes to poll taxpayers to find out what should be done about a Hurontario Street bridge that's in disrepair.

The condition of the bridge was first broached in 2017. It was a topic of discussion again during council's Nov. 8 public meeting.

A number of concerns were raised during the 2022 budget process about the cost to replace the bridge, whether it should be closed, rehabilitated, or replaced with a pedestrian crossing only.

Council decided then to get feedback from taxpayers by way of a residential survey on the bridge's future. In a report to council for the Nov. 8 meeting, town staff recommended the survey be issued on the town's website.

Public Works previously asked council to increase its yearly reserve contribution of \$150,000 to \$200,000 for the replacement of Bridge 5 on Hurontario Street north of Hockley Road and south of 10 Sideroad in 2024.

The original estimated replacement cost of \$1.1-million is increasing and it is estimated that \$1.3- to \$1.4-million will more accurately represent the future replacement cost, inclusive of engineering.

With upgrades to the overall bridge platform width, this project will be eligible for development charge contributions.

The bridge was built in 1925 and is a cast-in-place concrete frame over a tributary of the Nottawasaga River.

"We're getting to a point where Public Works is going to have to recommend an action to council," said Michael Dunmore, the department's director.

Public Works staff brought the condition of Bridge 5 to town council's attention in 2017 during discussions regarding the town's 2018 capital budget. Staff wanted money to be earmarked in the 2018 budget for the bridge.

Bridge 5 has continued to form a part of 2019, 2020, and 2021 Public Works Capital Budget Presentations for a contribution to the department's reserve funds to cover work in 2024.

The bridge was rehabilitated in 1999, but deterioration of its key elements were revealed during the town's biennial bridge inspections, with the latest 2020 report recommending replacement in 2024.

The general consensus is that the most cost-effective and practical option is to replace the structure.

"A new structure would take the current poor road alignment and roadside safety requirements into account, improving the town's existing road network and serve as a safe and alternative option to accessing the southern portion of the town," Dunmore wrote in a report to council.

Addressing the bridge's needs will affect the entire 2023 budget process. As such, the town is going to the public for their thoughts on a number of options.

Public Works recommends that this survey is accessed by ratepayers via the town website. This survey would be advertised on all town social media platforms. In conjunction with the website, council may wish to have a dedicated mailout that would try to get the survey into the hands of the road users.

Councillor Melinda Davie said council hasn't had very good luck getting public feedback from recent surveys. A survey to name two parkettes in the town had to be extended.

Coun. Sharon Martin wondered if a decision of such magnitude should be left to a handful of residents.

?There's a lot of money involved here and I would say that 23, 25 people who live in that close area, should they be making a decision that costs the town a considerable amount of money?? Martin said.

Mayor John Creelman agreed.

?Maybe we need to revisit some of the introductory language to make plain the fact we're sampling public opinion only,? he said. ?That we're not necessarily guided by a strong outcome in any direction. It's all subject to budget issues.?

Deputy Mayor Fred Nix said the town replaced a bridge near Highway 9 and another in the Hockley Road vicinity for a relative handful of houses served by each bridge.

?I think the people on Hurontario can turn around and say, ?Hey, you rebuilt those bridges,? Nix said. ?I know it's a lot of money. I'm just saying we have to be a little careful with this.?

Coun. Ralph Manktelow suggested regular users of the bridge wouldn't mind if it was closed altogether.

Dunmore said soliciting taxpayers' thoughts on the matter doesn't have to drive council's decision.