

Birch Street Reconstruction



For the past several years, residents of Birch Avenue have experienced growing frustration with house vibrations caused by heavy road vehicles (primarily OC Transpo buses). They are being promised relief. The City of Ottawa has scheduled a reconstruction of Birch Avenue for the fall of 2003. The City has two primary objectives: to address inadequacies in the current roadbed and to improve the handling of run-off water during heavy storms. Residents have been informed that the current roadbed (installed in 1987) is not up to the standard required for the weight of OC Transpo buses, and that the current sewer system is not adequate for storm situations. As part of the reconstruction project, the City is proposing the installation of a sidewalk on the Rockcliffe side of the street and will examine the possibility of adding street lighting. Birch Avenue residents should also note that following reconstruction the city is considering a moratorium of 1 year on road cuts for natural gas installation.

April 17 , 2003 Meeting

For Birch Avenue residents, the first indication of activity to come was a survey from the City in February asking for views on adding a sidewalk as part of the planned reconstruction. Not surprisingly, the survey elicited strong responses both pro and con, and residents met on February 19 to discuss issues and to identify points that needed further clarification. On April 17, Jacques Legendre, Councillor for Rideau-Rockcliffe Ward, organized an information/consultation session involving staff from City of Ottawa, OC Transpo, the engineering firm responsible for the design, the Councillor and his staff. The meeting was held at Manor Park School and was attended by approximately 50 residents from both Manor Park and Rockcliffe. The City presented preliminary drawings of the proposed construction, and provided presentations on the schedule, water services, sewer services, the new improved roadbed, the sidewalk proposal, lighting, and bus rerouting. The City presentations were followed by a vigorous question and answer session.

Project Proposals

The preliminary drawings show a new asphalt surface that is the same width and in the same location as the existing one, with a proposed 2 metre sidewalk on the west (Rockcliffe) side of Birch. The drawings show the placement of drains and manhole covers but no additional streetlights.

The project schedule calls for presentation of the final drawings in June with construction from September to November 2003. The City plans to install one coat of asphalt this year and then return in the spring of 2004 to attend to any settling that may have occurred and to lay the final coats of asphalt.

Water service will be upgraded. The existing service is a mixture of 6 inch and 12 inch water mains. Users on the 6 inch main will be transferred to the larger main. During reconstruction, households will be serviced by above ground pipes.

Sewer System Upgrade

Engineering design is being done by the firm J.L. Richards & Associates Ltd. A representative described the upgrades to the sewer system. The new design will provide all of Birch Avenue with a new storm sewer that will be separate from the sanitary sewer (household drains). The new storm sewer will be designed to handle greater run-off. Because it is separate from household waste and handles only surface run-off, the storm sewer will exit directly into the Ottawa River north of Manor Park

and will eventually be used to handle storm water from the rest of Manor Park. The current installation is environmentally unfriendly. Run-off water is carried through the pipes that handle household drains.

During normal conditions all of this material goes out to the treatment plant. However, during a heavy rainfall, the sewer mains cannot handle the volume, and the overflow (run-off and household waste) is sent directly (untreated) to the river. The improved service was of interest, but residents questions identified equal concern with the contributions made by the sewers and surface 'iron works' to the vibration problem.

Roadbed Reconstruction

The following presentation dealt with the plans for the reconstruction of the roadbed and the new surface - the aspects that most directly addressed audience concerns about vibrations. The reconstruction design specifically locates run-off grates at the curbs where they will not be subject to road traffic, and locates man-holes in the roadway where they will fall between the wheels of vehicles. In addition, the new roadbed will consist of coarser granular material that absorbs vibrations more effectively and a thicker asphalt surface that will also absorb vibrations and will be more durable.

Sidewalks

Aynsley Shepherd from the City of Ottawa explained the background on the sidewalk proposal. The City is interested in promoting walking as a way of getting about in Ottawa and developing the infrastructure to facilitate this. She noted that Manor Park is currently served by sidewalks on St. Laurent and Hemlock and that a sidewalk is planned for Sandridge in 2004. The City has a system for identifying the significance of a street for pedestrian use - based generally on where people walk to get to public access sites. She spoke to the increased safety provided by a sidewalk. She also addressed snow clearance. In winter the sidewalk would be cleared by the City crews: the sidewalk is cleared toward the road and the road is cleared toward the edge. Presumably there would need to be an increased level of snow removal. The City views Birch as providing access to a church (on Sandridge), to public pathways (opposite the Farnham and Eastbourne intersections), and to commercial services in New Edinburgh. They place Birch at the third level in their priority ranking. Sidewalk alternatives were also discussed. The City is considering a sidewalk on one side only, and the firm has investigated four options: east side of Birch versus west side of Birch, and with or without a grass strip separating the sidewalk from the road. They allocated 2 metres for a sidewalk and 2 metres for a grass divider. On the east side, the full package (4 metres for grass and sidewalk) would require the removal of 25 large trees, while the sidewalk only at 2 metres would seriously impact the roots of those same trees. A west side location would impact only 2 large trees and would also involve fewer driveways (17 versus 36) and fewer intersections (1 versus 2). As well, the west side location connects with the pedestrian pathway at Farnham and would improve control of water run-off. In a heavy rain water moves west from Manor Park towards McKay Lake. A curb would serve as a barrier to redirect the flow to storm sewers - thereby offering some measure of protection against flooding to properties on the west side of Birch. Based on analysis of these factors, the initial City plan favours a 2 metre sidewalk adjacent to the road on the west side of Birch (with no grass separator between the road and the sidewalk).

Street Lighting

Street lights were discussed next. Notwithstanding the history of this issue on both the Manor Park and Rockcliffe sides, the City acknowledges that this is a significant safety issue. The question of lighting was submitted by residents as an outcome of the February 19 residents meeting but lights are not in the City budget for reconstruction. The City will investigate the possibility of finding budget money for lighting and is soliciting residents' views on the question. The City's response would be to install 14

'cobra head' style fixtures on 30 foot poles on the west side of Birch. This would resemble the lighting that is used on Hemlock. When asked about the more decorative 'post' lamps that are used in the interior of Manor Park it was indicated that this would be double the estimated cost of \$80,000. The decorative fixtures are installed on 20 foot posts and because of the width of Birch Avenue it would be necessary to install lamps on both sides. It was implied that City budget would not cover this added expense.

Bus Rerouting

A representative of OC Transpo described preparations for rerouting buses during the reconstruction. This will be necessary only during the most disruptive phase of the reconstruction and will involve redirecting buses onto Merriman, Arundel, Dunvegan, Lonsdale and Justin. He indicated that OC Transpo is very much aware of the need for special attention to safety on the narrower interior streets.

The presentations were followed (and occasionally interrupted) by vigorous questioning and participation by the audience. These contributions expressed both pro and con positions on the sidewalk, complaints about buses speeding, compliments that most bus drivers are conscientious and courteous, concerns about the disruptions Birch and neighbouring streets will face during reconstruction, and frustrations with vibrations caused by traffic. It would be challenging to represent all of the differing expressed views accurately. Suffice to say that the meeting was organized by the City for the purpose of providing information on the proposed reconstruction and to solicit feedback on those plans. No decisions were being made. Residents at the meeting were given a Comment Sheet to fill out. Residents unable to attend the meeting should submit their views to: Jamie MacDonald, Transportation, Utilities and Public Works Department, City of Ottawa, 560 Rochester Street, Ottawa, K1S 5K2. He can be reached by e-mail at jamie.macdonald@ottawa.ca or by Fax at **560-6064**. The comment sheets ask for name, phone number, and address. It may be possible to view the design drawings that were on display at the meeting. Anyone interested should contact Jacques Legendre's office if interested.

The City plans to review comments received and come back to residents with a 'final' design in June. Following the April 17 meeting, Birch residents understand that the questions of whether there will be a sidewalk, the configuration of a sidewalk if chosen, whether there should be lighting, and what style of lighting remain to be decided although residents left the meeting with the clear impression that the City favours a sidewalk. Birch residents plan another meeting to discuss the reconstruction proposal now that there is a clearer picture of what is on the table.