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Date **March 2, 2021**

Report No. 2021-97

To Chair and Members
Committee of the Whole – Operations and Administration

From Inderjit Hans, P. Eng., PMP
General Manager, Public Works Commission

1.0 Type of Report

Consent Item	<input type="checkbox"/>
Item For Consideration	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

2.0 Topic Closure of Pedestrian Stairway from Usher Street to West Street [Financial Impact – None]

3.0 Recommendation

A. THAT report no. 2021-97 regarding “Closure of Pedestrian Stairway from Usher Street to West Street” BE RECEIVED.

4.0 Executive Summary

This report provides City Council with feedback received in response to the loss of accessibility to West Street if the stairway at the east end of Usher Street was closed. Only one (1) resident responded to the survey. Their response supported the closure of the steps to reduce loitering and crime.

Brantford Police Service confirmed there have been several incidents of theft from adjacent properties in 2020.

Pedestrians use the stairs at the east end of Usher Street to provide them access between the Terrace Hill neighbourhood and downtown.

5.0 Purpose and Overview

To provide City Council with the results of the feedback received in response to the proposed closure of the pedestrian stairway at the east end of Usher Street to West Street.

The report also summarises information received from CN, Brantford Police Service, Staff observations and any maintenance complaints received.

6.0 Background

City Council passed the following resolution at its meeting held October 27, 2020:

Closure of Pedestrian Steps from West Street to Usher Street

WHEREAS residents on Usher St have complained for years about illegal activities on the pedestrian steps and unwanted impact on and around homes which include theft, loitering, littering and public urination; and

WHEREAS the steps are constantly littered with debris and syringes which could result in health risks for adults and minors; and

WHEREAS Police Services are often called by residents regarding illegal activities taking place on the steps; and

WHEREAS better illumination of the steps has been installed with no significant reduction in illegal activities; and

WHEREAS a permanent solution needs to be implemented at the possible date to close the steps;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED:

- A. THAT staff BE DIRECTED to send letters to residents of Usher Street (east limit of Usher Street to the intersection of Rushton Avenue and Usher Street) for purpose of receiving their feedback with respect to the loss of accessibility to West Street from closing the stairs located at the east end of Usher Street; and
- B. THAT staff BE DIRECTED to consult with CN and Brantford Police Services for their input and data on reported activities regarding the stairs located on both the east and west sides of West Street north of the CN Bridge no later than Q4 2020; and
- C. THAT staff BE DIRECTED to research the stairs located at the east end

of Usher Street for any history of incidents that resulted in closure of the stairs and complaints received regarding inaccessibility over the past 12 months and REPORT BACK to Council regarding with this information and the results of the public feedback Q1 2021.

7.0 Corporate Policy Context

In preparing this report, staff considered the City of Brantford Council Priorities, 2020-2021, which identifies the following as Desired Outcome #3:

A safe, efficient transportation system connects the community across neighbourhoods, with neighbouring communities and provincial transportation network.

Tier 2 E Priority from this desired outcome is as follows:

Develop a comprehensive plan to integrate active transportation networks with measures for improved connectivity and enhanced maintenance.

The City of Brantford Transportation Master Plan established goals and objectives for each mode of travel, based on technical review and input from stakeholders and the public. The goal and objectives for the walking mode are identified as follows:

GOAL: Be a complete, accessible, and pedestrian-friendly community with networks that integrate with transit, paths and trails, neighbourhood amenities, parks, open space and schools.

OBJECTIVES:

1. Facilities provide a high level of pedestrian connectivity
2. Walking environment is safe for users
3. Pedestrian accessibility, comfort, and mobility levels of user support walking as a preferred mode.

8.0 Input from Other Sources

Seventeen (17) letters were delivered to properties on Usher Street between Rushton Avenue and the east end of Usher Street, requesting feedback on the proposed closure of the pedestrian stairway from Usher Street to West Street. A copy of the letter is attached as Appendix "A" to this report.

Staff received one response to the letter. The resident's concerns are as follows:

- People frequently loiter and do drugs at the east end of Usher Street;
- Incidents of theft and vandalism at adjacent properties;
- Constant littering;

- Often call Brantford Police but the people are usually gone by the time the Police arrive;
- Closure of the stairs would restrict access to West Street, and the area would no longer be a hangout.

Engineering Services department reviewed this report and confirmed the information provided regarding Active Transportation component of the current Transportation Master Plan.

9.0 Analysis

The pedestrian stairway is located at the east end of Usher Street, adjacent to the CN railway bridge over West Street. The location of the stairway is shown in Figure 1 below. The stairway provides pedestrian access between Usher Street and West Street. Closure of the stairway would create a barrier to pedestrians by eliminating the shortest route to access West Street from Usher Street. If the stairway was closed, pedestrians would be required to walk an additional 170 metres by taking an alternate route down Washington Street and Buffalo Street.

Staff contacted both CN and Brantford Police Service for their input and data on reported activities regarding the Usher Street stairway. CN Police didn't have reports of any issues and do not have any concerns with closing the stairway.

Brantford Police record incidents by address making it difficult to identify concerns related specifically to the stairway. There were two (2) incidents reported near the CN overpass in 2020:

- a person that was acting suspicious
- a person that was intoxicated.

At the east end of Usher Street, there were six (6) incidents report in 2020:

- Four (4) incidents involved theft from property or motor vehicle
- One (1) incident was an unwanted person at a residential property
- One (1) was a resident who thought they heard gun shots (Not proven).

It is unknown how the number of incidents reported near the stairway compare to other properties in the neighbourhood.

The Operational Services Department received six (6) service requests pertaining to the stairway in 2020:

- Four (4) of the concerns reported debris and litter on the stairway; staff was dispatched and the garbage was removed. In two (2) of the cases, needles were found and they were reported to the Brant County Health Unit (BCHU) to be safely removed and disposed of.
- One (1) request was to install a lock on the gate blocking off the stairway on the east side of West Street. A lock was subsequently installed.

- The last service request asked that the stairway at the end of Usher Street be closed to decrease foot traffic and illegal activities that are frequently occurring on Usher Street because of the easy access to the neighbourhood. The stairway was inspected and found to be in good condition.

Stairways exist in three of the four quadrants of the CN overpass crossing West Street. The stairway at the east end of Usher Street, in the north west quadrant, is the only one that remains open. The stairway on south side of the railway line, at the east end of the VIA station platform, was closed in the mid-2010s because of the deteriorated condition of the railings and concrete. The other stairway in the north east quadrant has been closed for many years; it only provides access to a vacant property adjacent to Greenwood Cemetery.

Staff conducted a pedestrian count at the Usher Street stairs on November 25, 2020. In the ten (10) hour study period, 24 pedestrians were observed using the stairway. Some pedestrians appeared to be out for a walk, several others were observed carrying groceries home. It should also be noted that most pedestrians walked from beyond Usher Street making it clear that the stairway provides access for residents throughout the neighbourhood, and not just residents of Usher Street.

One of City Council's priorities is to provide a safe, efficient transportation system connecting the community across neighbourhoods. there are many on-going projects that have a desired outcome of encouraging more active transportation, connectivity and improving walkability within the city, including the Active Transportation Strategy (a component of the Transportation Master Plan), Downtown Streetscaping Environmental Assessment, Greyfields Revitalization Strategy, and Age-Friendly Strategy, to name a few. Closure of the stairway at the east end of Usher Street would restrict access to this neighbourhood.

The CN railway track is a barrier to connectivity between the Terrace Hill neighbourhood and downtown. The railway corridor is fully fenced between West Street and Rushton Avenue. Closure of the stairway may result in vandalism to the fence to create a short-cut, trespassing across railway property to shorten the walking distance to/from downtown.

Figure 1 - Usher Street Stairway



10.0 Financial Implications

Not applicable.

11.0 Conclusion

One (1) resident responded to the letter requesting that the stairway at the east end of Usher Street be closed to reduce loitering and crime on Usher Street. Brantford Police reported that there have been four (4) incidents of theft or vandalism to property adjacent to the stairway in 2020.

During a ten (10) hour study, staff observed twenty-four (24) pedestrians access the stairway. Many of the pedestrians walked from beyond Usher Street. The stairway encourages walking and provides pedestrian access between the Terrace Hill neighbourhood and the downtown.



Inderjit Hans, P. Eng., PMP
General Manager, Public Works Commission

Prepared By:

Rob Smith, C.E.T., Transportation Technologist

Attachments

Appendix "A" – Letter dated November 27, 2021 regarding Usher Street Proposed Closure of Pedestrian Stairway – Request for Comment

In adopting this report, is a by-law or agreement required? If so, it should be referenced in the recommendation section.

By-law required ☐ yes ☒ no

Agreement(s) or other documents to be signed by Mayor and/or City Clerk ☐ yes ☒ no

Is the necessary by-law or agreement being sent concurrently to Council? ☐ yes ☒ no

APPENDIX "A"



November 27, 2020

Usher Street Proposed Closure of Pedestrian Stairway – Request for Comment

Dear Residents:

Closure of the pedestrian stairway at the east end of Usher Street to West Street is under consideration by City Council.

Council has directed staff to solicit feedback from the affected neighbourhood for the purpose of receiving their comments and/or concerns with respect to the loss of accessibility to West Street from closing the pedestrian stairway.

The location of the stairway is shown in the diagram on the reverse of this letter.

Your input is important. Please provide feedback regarding this proposal by Friday, December 11, 2020 to Rob Smith, C.E.T., Transportation Technologist directly at 519-759-4150 Ext. 5683 or E-mail at rsmith@brantford.ca. Feedback will be reported to City Council to aide in their decision.

Yours truly,

Tom Sliwinski, A.Sc.T.
Supervisor of Parking Operations & R.O.W. Enforcement

CC: Councillor J. Sless
Councillor J. Utley
B. Hutchings, CAO
I. Hans, P. Eng., General Manager, Public Works Commission
R. Loukes, P. Eng., Director of Engineering Services
M. Jacklyn, Director of Operational Services

