

Pedestrian safety project gets green light

JASON FEKETE CALGARY HERALD

Crossing the street may soon be a lot safer for Calgarians, as the city is set to launch a major initiative to improve pedestrian safety and curb the disturbing number of injury accidents.

Municipal planners are working on a one-year pilot project that will examine several changes to traffic control policies, including tinkering with walk signals and increasing the number and visibility of designated crosswalks.

"When you consider how many pedestrian-vehicle collisions there's been in the last year, I think it's a good initiative," said Ald. Dale Hodges, chairman of the city's transportation committee.

The proposed improvements come at a time when pedestrian fatalities have been well documented in the news.

In March, a judge sentenced a woman to pay the maximum \$2,000 fine and serve a three-month driving prohibition for careless driving in an accident that killed two University of Calgary rugby players in 2003.

Also in March, Lindsay Giacomelli, 20, died after she was struck in a hit and run while using a crosswalk on Bonaventure Drive S.E.

Aldermen said the alarming trend of pedestrian accidents needs to be addressed and the pilot project is well worth the city's time and money, if it can save a few more lives.

"This is one of the few times we want less bang for our buck," Ald. Ric McIver quipped Wednesday at a meeting of the transportation committee, which green-lighted the project's initial framework.

Reports prepared for the city by a world-renowned transportation specialist and an engineering firm made several recommendations for improving safety, including:

- Adjusting pedestrian signal timing to better reflect walking speeds;

- Starting the walk light three seconds before the green light so drivers can more easily see pedestrians;

- Installing more traffic-calming measures in residential areas to slow vehicles; and
- Implementing mid-block crossings in high-incident areas. There are about 350 pedestrian accidents in Calgary each year, and municipal staff will monitor 16 to 20 intersections during the project, said Cam Nelson, the city's traffic safety co-ordinator.

JFEKETE@THEHERALD.CANWEST.COM