

Harwood Ave Bike Lanes local news story posted July 11, 2024.

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'It's really troubling': Ajax removing bike lanes on Harwood Avenue, adding off-road multi-use path

Mayor Shaun Collier says he ran for the job on removing the bike lanes in 2018, and six years later, they are coming out.

By [Kristen Calis](#) Ajax News Advertiser

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4 min to read

The bike lanes that were installed on Harwood Avenue South in Ajax about a decade ago are slated to be a thing of the past.

"For me it's really troubling and it's mystifying why there would be a move to remove those bike lanes," former mayor Steve Parish said. "They've been successful. They haven't interrupted or harmed vehicle or car traffic at all."

But to current Mayor Shaun Collier, the bike lanes were a mistake from the beginning.

"I ran on this in 2018," Collier said at the May council meeting when the matter arose. "I didn't support putting the bike lanes in."

In the near future, the Town of Ajax plans to remove the northbound and southbound bike lanes on [Harwood from Dreyer Street](#) down to the lake, and install an off-road multi-use path (MUP) on the east side, [up to Bayly Street](#).

Right now, Harwood south of Dreyer has a buffered bike lane.

"So you don't get any conflict between cyclists and pedestrians, which you do if you have a multi-use path," said Ajax resident and cyclist Derek Lee, who spoke before council in May, asking them to reconsider the removal plans.

Lee says he speaks more as a resident than as a cyclist, floored by this cost to the taxpayer.

"I collected a petition with over 200 signatures on it and it was totally ignored," Lee said.

"It's irresponsible. The town council has a duty to respect the wishes of the residents."

Sam Paterson, government relations and strategic initiatives coordinator, confirmed the total budgeted amount for the project is \$1.8 million, including the construction of the MUP and the return of the lanes on Harwood from Dreyer to [McRae Road](#), to two vehicle lanes in each direction.

The history

Paterson explained the initial plan was to stretch bike lanes toward the downtown, an option that would have removed a lane all the way up to Station Street.

She said in 2018, Collier advocated for an MUP and “that this would be a better flow of traffic rather than the on-street bike lanes.”

Safety concerns

Paterson said the town has received complaints about the bike lanes in the past.

“The multi-use path is creating a safe route for everyone,” she said.

Parish submitted a freedom of information request regarding incidents related to the bike lanes.

“And the result was that there was absolutely no documentation of any safety concerns, traffic issues, et cetera et cetera, so there’s no foundation of that whatsoever,” he said.

Staff recommendation

Parish said the public was consulted extensively when the bike lanes were put in initially, but not this time.

“There has been absolutely no consultation with the public, there’s been a total ignoring of the town staff recommendation that the status quo of the lanes is working,” Parish said.

Parish is referring to a staff report regarding a 2021 feasibility study on the potential MUP on Harwood that stated: “Numerous previous studies have noted that while a multi-use path may be a preferable facility for more users, the proposed on-road facilities are appropriate from the corridor, will provide a high quality active transportation facility in the corridor and have previously been supported for implementation by residents.”

Council had requested the MUP feasibility study and hired a consultant to undertake it. This study cost \$50,000 and recommended the MUP be built on the west side, which was ignored.

“So that’s \$50,000 down the drain,” Lee said.

Council ended up passing Collier’s motion that staff proceed with the detailed design of an off-road MUP on the east side of Harwood between Bayly Street and Lake Driveway.

Strong-mayor powers

The current plans were passed as part of the 2024 mayor’s budget, which Collier may exercise under the [Strong Mayors, Building Homes Act](#).

The only thing he added into the budget was \$425,000 to change the road, he said at the May meeting.

“We passed a motion to do this, and I formed a budget to make that happen,” Collier said.

He said the petition Lee referred to was misleading and didn’t explain the original plan was to have on-road bike lanes from Bayly to the lake.

“If this said, ‘Would you prefer a three-metre off road multi-use path all the way — full connectivity — from the waterfront all the way to Bayly versus the current plan of on-road cycling infrastructure all the way down, and the cost is the same, which is what the full story is,’ he felt the response would be different.

The cyclists

Parish is an avid cyclist who travels on Harwood both in his car and on his bike on a regular basis.

“I find two things,” he said. “I find a low volume of car traffic and a low volume of bike traffic. There’s plenty of space for both.”

Lee doesn't claim the lanes are constantly busy, but he did note the Strava app he and many cyclists use to track their rides indicate considerable usage on the Harwood bike lane.

The Durham Region Cycling Coalition called the plans "a step in the wrong direction" in a February letter.

Parish urges members of the public to reach out to the mayor or their local councillor if they have concerns about the plans.

Council's thoughts

At the May council meeting, Ward 1 Regional Coun. Marilyn Crawford pointed out the plans have been made public through the budget.

"This budget was transparent," Crawford said. "This budget was public."

Ward 3 Regional Coun. Joanne Dies introduced an unsuccessful motion that council reaffirm staff's recommendations of 2021.

Collier shot down concerns that this will negatively impact the designation of Ajax having the Bike Friendly Community silver designation.

Collier also dismissed drag racing concerns with the two lanes reinstalled and said it's a short stretch and people do not drag race there.

Ward 3 Coun. Lisa Bower said when she ran in 2018, top concerns when canvassing at the door were to get rid of the bike lanes, that they're unsafe, and it's mayhem to get in and out of [St. James Catholic School](#).

She said she went on six occasions to observe the traffic near the school and saw few bikes, a lot of cars, kids crossing unsafely and on more than one occasion, some near accidents.

"To me, that speaks to the comments from the residents that started in 2018 and continue today that it is dangerous," Bower said.

The timeline

The town expects to begin construction and wrap it up in the fall, Paterson said.

The MUP project is phased into three sections between McRae and Bayly. The detailed design for Section 1 and Section 2 is complete and was tendered in May. The detail design for Section 3 is expected to be completed by the summer.