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County of Dufferin considers awareness initiative for horse and buggies

Written By **Paula Brown**

The Township of Melancthon is looking to address road safety concerns for horse and buggy drivers by introducing new policies for road rehabilitation and awareness initiatives at the county level.

During the County's Infrastructure and Environmental Services Committee meeting on May 23, Melancthon Deputy Mayor James McLean spoke to committee members regarding road safety concerns for the Mennonite community.

Melancthon is one of the only municipalities in Dufferin County with a large Mennonite community, but McLean noted they frequently travel to other locations including Shelburne and Mulmur.

So far, this year there have been two major collisions involving horse and buggies that have occurred in Melancthon. The first incident was in January, resulting in the death of a 21-year-old buggy driver, and most recently there was an accident in April involving two adults and six children, who sustained non-life-threatening injuries.

Members of the Mennonite community met with Melancthon Council at a recent council meeting to discuss road safety.

?They told us that they are concerned for their safety,? said McLean.

During the meeting, McLean and Melancthon Mayor Darren White raised the question of why they opt to use busy highways where motorists are travelling at high rates of speed and collisions are common, rather than choose to drive on paralleling county roads.

They said the primary issue is the size of the shoulder on county roads is too narrow, while the highways have a shoulder that can fit their entire horse and buggy.

?They told us that they believe that the county and township roads are not built to facilitate their safe passage,? said McLean. ?They believe that our roads are not built to keep them safe, and as examples they pointed to narrow shoulders on the sides of roads that mean at least on horse and part of their carriage must be on the road at all times.?

The Mennonite community also noted there is insufficient signage warning of horse and buggies on Township and County roads including County Road 9, County Road 2 and County Road 124.

?This is not to point fingers. We have a lot of work to do at the township level, but it's telling that in the minds of the Mennonite community, the intense speed and irrational driving behavior that occurs on Highway 10 everyday was still safer for them because of the wider shoulder than county and township roads,? said McLean.

McLean added that concerns about the width of the roads and insufficient signage are not specific to the Mennonite community alone.

?Many of the road width and signage concerns raised by Mennonite leaders are not unique to that community; they also apply to farmers who have to travel by tractor across our roads,? he said. ?This is a countywide issue that impacts more than just the Mennonite community.?

While making adjustments to the road networks was indicated as a solution for road safety, McLean also pointed out the need to raise awareness and enforcement.

The Township of Melancthon is in the process of creating a guide to help inform motorists on how to safely approach and pass horse

and buggies, similar to guides created in the Township of Southgate and Waterloo Region.

?Recognizing that this resource may be applicable to other Dufferin municipalities, our planner has shared this draft resource with County senior leadership for feedback and comment. We hope to have staff and Council support in the development and the promotion of that guide.?

As part of addressing road safety, McLean suggests introducing new policies or doing a review of existing policies to add an additional lens for slow-moving vehicles when planning the rehabilitation of roadways.

?The fact that we rehabilitated County Road 9 a few years ago and narrow shoulders are being raised among the Mennonite community, indicated to me that perhaps we aren't applying that lens fully.?

Following the conclusion of McLean's delegation, members from the Infrastructure and Environmental Services Committee reflected on their own observations of slow-moving vehicles on high-speed roads.

Farm equipment going across County Rd. 109 on a daily basis, it's very dangerous because of the slow-moving vehicles, but at the same time it's not equitable to ask them to use secondary roads; they're public roads. I think it's great [and] we need to absolutely look at that,? said Coun. Chris Gerrits, Mayor of Amaranth.

Mulmur Mayor, Janet Horner, as spoke about an incident that had occurred in Mulmur, and added the need to bring the Dufferin OPP into the discussion process on road safety.

?They're the ones that are out there trying to deal with the aftermath of what happened when there's an incident and so maybe we need some perspective from them on how to proceed,? said Coun. Horner.

Scott Burns, Dufferin County engineer and director of public works said he is confident staff will be able to find solutions that will help address road safety concerns for horse and buggy drivers.

?There are lots of jurisdictions that have responses to buggies, so I think we can absolutely do some homework and see what other jurisdictions have done and then sort of filter that through our process and likely bring that back,? said Burns.

The committee passed a motion to have County staff investigate solutions to road safety for horse and buggy drivers, which will be brought back for the Infrastructure and Environmental Services Committee meeting in August.