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Shelburne updates sidewalk bylaw to improve accessibility

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Shelburne council has approved a new Sidewalk Use Bylaw ? replacing regulations that have remained largely unchanged for decades ? with a town-wide framework that addresses accessibility concerns, modern transportation and updated enforcement tools.

Council adopted By-law 29-2026 during its July 13 meeting, repealing the previous sidewalk bylaw adopted in 1999 and two subsequent amendments.

In a report to council, town staff said the existing bylaw was limited, in part, to regulating temporary business displays and sidewalk obstructions in portions of the downtown core.

Since then, municipal legislation has evolved, accessibility standards have been introduced, and transportation devices such as electric bicycles and e-scooters have become increasingly common.

The new bylaw seeks to update the old codes and rules to reflect this new reality.

Rather than applying only to selected downtown sidewalks, the new bylaw extends to all municipal sidewalks under the town's jurisdiction, a change staff said will improve consistency, simplify enforcement and eliminate the need to amend the bylaw as new sidewalks are constructed.

The bylaw sets a minimum unobstructed pedestrian travel route of 1.8 metres and requires temporary business displays, signs, and other sidewalk obstructions to maintain accessible routes for pedestrians, particularly people with disabilities, seniors, children, and those using strollers or mobility aids, without encroaching on this route.

The bylaw is also aimed at bringing municipal regulations into better alignment with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act.

The most extensive discussion centred on provisions prohibiting bicycles, e-bikes, e-scooters, skateboards, hoverboards, and other recreational or motorized devices from operating on municipal sidewalks, while exempting mobility aids used by persons with disabilities.

Councillors questioned whether the prohibition could unintentionally affect young children learning to ride bicycles or families who may choose sidewalks over busy roads for safety.

Concerns were also raised about how the bylaw would be enforced in practice, given the limited authority bylaw officers wield, compared to police.

Staff responded that enforcement would not be aggressive and would continue to prioritize education and voluntary compliance where possible.

The report notes enforcement will be primarily complaint-driven, with proactive enforcement focused mainly on the downtown core and during community events as resources permit.

Municipal bylaw enforcement officers, as always, may request identification only when they have reasonable grounds to believe a bylaw offence has occurred, but they do not have any extra authority to stop minors for identification under the new bylaw, a power

reserved for police officers only.

The new bylaw will also introduce Administrative Monetary Penalties for violations, including fines for obstructing sidewalks, blocking accessible pedestrian routes, and operating prohibited devices on sidewalks.

Shelburne council's next regular meeting is scheduled for Aug. 24.