



Report to: Development Services Committee

Meeting Date: May 16, 2023

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**SUBJECT:** Open Street Program Update (City-wide)

**PREPARED BY:** David Porretta, Manager, Traffic Engineering, Ext. 2040  
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**RECOMMENDATION:**

1. That the staff report titled “Open Street Program Update (City-wide)” be received; and
2. That the Open Street Program be re-imagined as a special City event beginning in 2024; and further,
3. That staff be authorized and directed to do all things necessary to give effect to this resolution.

**PURPOSE:**

This report provides a review of the Open Street Program, implemented annually between 2020 and 2022 as directed by Council in response to public health restrictions resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, and recommends re-imagining the Open Street Program as a special City event starting in 2024.

**BACKGROUND:**

The Open Street Program was developed as part of the City’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic, consisting of implementing various traffic control measures to provide additional space for walking and cycling while maintaining physical distancing guidelines, and to promote more active lifestyle activities during the pandemic as community and recreational facilities were closed.

**Open Street Program was initiated in 2020**

At the June 8, 2020 Development Services Committee meeting, staff was directed to implement the following initiatives:

- Closure of Enterprise Boulevard from Andre de Grasse Street to Main Street Unionville on Sundays and statutory holidays, between July 1 and September 7;
- Restrict access to local traffic on Main Street Unionville between Fred Varley Drive and Carlton Road through road narrowing at select locations, until October 31;
- Develop and implement a 12 km “Villages & Valley” Walking and Cycling Loop, connecting Unionville and Markham villages, via local roads and trail systems;
- Explore additional opportunities for similar walking and cycling loop routes and potential weekend street closures for cycling activity in Thornhill and Milliken Mills.

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At the November 9, 2020 Development Services Committee meeting, staff provided an update on the 2020 Open Street Program. Council directed staff to work with the Cycling & Pedestrian Advisory Committee and consult with local Councillors in developing an annual Open Street program. .

**Open Street Program was continued in 2021**

At the April 19, 2021 DSC meeting, staff presented several initiatives for the annual Open Street Program in 2021. The 2021 Program included:

- Closure of Middlefield Road from Highglen Avenue to Denison Street on Sundays and statutory holidays, between July 1 and September 6 (total of 13 closure-days). This closure included programming the space, in coordination with Recreation Services Department and Markham Cycles.
- Implementing a modified “Slow Street” initiative on Main Street Unionville between Fred Varley Drive and Carlton Road, with additional treatments to support patio expansions, from May to October 2021.
- Develop a Corporate Communications Plan to advertise the Program.

**Open Street Program was modified in 2022 to reflect relaxed public health restrictions**

In early 2022, the Province of Ontario announced that public health restrictions around COVID-19 were being gradually lifted. The City of Markham’s community and recreational services offered to residents and businesses were reopened in a limited capacity. Recognizing the improved options for residents to access recreational opportunities, the annual Open Street program in 2022 was delivered with a reduced scope, which included:

- Closure of Middlefield Road from Highglen Avenue to Denison Street on Sundays and statutory holidays, between July 31 and September 5 (total of 8 closure-days).
- Programming of the open space included coordination of activities with Recreation Services and Economic Growth Departments, and Markham Arts Council.
- Continuing the “Slow Street” initiative on Main Street Unionville between Fred Varley Drive and Carlton Road, from May to October 2022.
- A Corporate Communications Plan to advertise the Program.

**OPTIONS/ DISCUSSION:****Some activation and programs were added to promote the event**

Each year the Open Street Program was conducted, some level of activity programming was offered to attract users to the event, including information sharing to help educate the public on the benefits of an active lifestyle. The list of different program activities offered over the three years is summarized below:

- Markham Cycles bike tune-up booth (2020, 2021, 2022)
- Drop-in Zumba classes coordinated by Recreation Services Department (2021, 2022)
- Bike Loan Program through Markham Cycles (2021)

- Markham Arts Council program (live music, yoga, balloon twisting, book bazaar) coordinated by Economic Growth Department (2022)

Summarized below is the level of participation at the Markham Cycles booth and Zumba classes, for each year.

	Location	Markham Cycles Booth Visitors	Drop-in Zumba Class
2020	Enterprise Boulevard	360	-
2021	Middlefield Road	697	89
2022	Middlefield Road	57	80

In 2022, Markham Cycles was only able to provide service on two road closure days due to the resumption of Markham Cycles' regular programming at their two community bicycle hub locations and their limited capacity to provide ongoing service for the Open Street Program.

#### **Participation grew but remained low**

Pedestrian and cyclist counts were conducted on select Sundays and statutory holidays, to determine the approximate level of utilization of the available open space. Daily average volumes of pedestrians and cyclists over the past three years are summarized below.

	Location	Road Closure Occurrences	Avg. 24-Hr Volume		TOTAL COUNT
			Pedestrians	Cyclists	
2020	Enterprise Boulevard	13	133	248	381
2021	Middlefield Road	13	365	646	1,011
2022	Middlefield Road	8	337	762	1,099

Based on the data collected, it can be surmised that the attendance on Enterprise Boulevard was relatively low. This can be attributed to the lack of nearby residences or amenities to attract users to this location and minimal programming. However, in both 2021 and 2022, the closures of Middlefield Road had much higher utilization. This can be due to a combination of factors:

- Proximity to adjacent residential area and community park;
- Socio-demographic attribute of the surrounding area that typically generates a modest base level of daily pedestrian activity;
- Increased activation and programming attracted more participants;
- A communications plan was in place to advertise the program.

A caveat to this data is that it included pedestrian and cyclist traffic that would normally be present on a typical summer Sunday or statutory holiday when Open Street is not being held. Thus, the true impact of the Open Street program on pedestrian and cyclist volume cannot be accurately identified.

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**Staff resources required to continue the Open Street program is a challenge**

Staff from various departments provided support to implement the annual Open Street Program over the past three years, with each program year requiring 350+ person-hours of staff time to plan and organize. This included staff resources from Engineering, Operations, Recreation Services, Economic Growth, and Corporate Communications.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, City programs and services were generally reduced, and projects deferred. As such, staffing resources could be allocated to administer the Open Street Program. However, as City events and services are returning to regular levels, and capital and operating projects have returned to pre-pandemic levels, it is no longer feasible to allocate the same staffing resources to conduct the Open Street Program without an increase in staffing.

**Costs to run the Open Street program is expected to increase due to high inflation**

The Open Street Program was funded by the City and through corporate sponsorships. Total costs are shown in the table below, not including staff time from the various departments to implement the program:

Year	Total Cost	City Funding	Sponsorship Funding
2020	\$ 61,350	\$ 61,350	N/A
2021	\$ 64,540	\$16,040	\$48,500
2022	\$ 46,500	\$36,500	\$10,000

Expenses in 2022 were lower than prior years due to the reduced scope of the project that year. A majority of the expenses was allocated toward the development and implementation of the traffic management plan and traffic control devices to facilitate the road closures. The expenses also included traffic data collection, monitoring and analysis, mobile advertisement signs, social media advertisements, other promotional tools and various program activations. Expenses do not consider the significant staff time (over 350 person-hours) to develop, coordinate, and administer the program each year.

**The current concept of the Open Street Program is no longer needed**

As COVID-19 pandemic restrictions have been lifted, City events and services are returning to normal operation in 2023. This includes numerous in-person special events such as Canada Day, Markham Cycling Day, Children Festival and more. Residents will be provided opportunities to participate in these special events, access various City facilities and recreational programs, and continue to enjoy the City using existing active modes of travel.

Markham Cycles will also be conducting regular programming at their two community bicycle hub locations at Milliken Mills Community Centre and Centennial Community Centre, which will include bicycle tune-ups, bicycle loan, group rides and many other bicycle-related programming.

As well, planned construction works on Main Street Unionville is anticipated to commence in 2023, and therefore, traffic mitigation measures to encourage patio expansion and pedestrian walking spaces may not be feasible to implement due to conflicting activities within the municipal right-of-way.

Finally, as the City is returning to normal operations with the opening of community centres and recreational facilities, the original objective of the Open Street Program, to provide additional opportunities for walking and cycling, is no longer needed.

**Open Street Program should be transformed into a non-COVID related special event**

With regular recreational and urban activities returning back to pre-pandemic levels, Open Street can be re-imagined as a non-COVID related event. To give sufficient time for planning it with an entirely different focus, staff recommend that the “new” Open Street Program start in 2024, and be transformed into a street event involving sponsors, vendors, City booths, food trucks and other stakeholder participation that can better animate the street and the Program as a whole.

As Middlefield Road has been used in the past two years of the Open Street Program and its road closure template is available, staff suggest that the 2024 version of the new Open Street Program be held there to reduce overall effort. Therefore, the new program will not involve the “Slow Street” initiative on Main Street Unionville as there are already other annual events held there.

**Additional resources would likely be needed to conduct Open Street**

Staff have not planned and budgeted for the Open Street Program in 2023 due to the following issues:

- The workload pressures and significant resources required to plan and organize such an event;
- Low participation attendance at the event post-pandemic;
- Increased cost for hosting the events; and
- Return to normal operations of community centres and recreational facilities.

It should be noted that upon further review of this new re-imagined program, there will most likely be a need for more resources and budget to plan and host such events. Staff will submit a 2024 budget request for Council approval as part of the annual budget request and approval process.

**FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Not applicable.

**HUMAN RESOURCES CONSIDERATIONS**

Not applicable.

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**ALIGNMENT WITH STRATEGIC PRIORITIES:**

The Open Street Program aligns with the City's strategic goal of an engaged, diverse, thriving and vibrant City and the specific objective of supporting arts, culture, recreation and sport to enrich the fabric of our communities.

**BUSINESS UNITS CONSULTED AND AFFECTED:**

The Open Street Program and this report has been reviewed and discussed with Economic Growth department.

**RECOMMENDED BY:**

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Director, Engineering

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