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## Council pegs Hub Trail James Street link as 'top priority'

*The trail spoke won't be completed until funding is available.*

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NORTHERNER(S): Charlie the mini doodle, not much more than a pup at six months, enjoyed his wet and snowy walk on the weekend, report Phil and Celine. They had their own praise for the snowfall; it made a 'beautiful day' for an afternoon stroll over the Hub Trail through Fort Creek . ALLANA PLAUNT/SPECIAL TO SAULT THIS WEEK jpg, SH

City council tossed aside a suggestion that it shouldn't preempt a consultants report by identifying its highest priority for future spending on the Hub Trail.

Instead, in an 8-3 decision, council passed a resolution Monday declaring the Old West End and James Street area connection is it highest priority when funding becomes available to connect the neighbourhood to the non-motorized trail.

The motion, moved by Ward 3 Coun. Matthew Shoemaker and seconded by Ward 4 Coun. Rick Niro reiterates what Shoemaker has been attempting to do for quite some time.

The resolution also directs staff to prepare a route for the connection to be ready to move forward if funding becomes available.

Shoemaker told city council that there have been other proposals and projects identified to add to or alter the Hub Trail and he remains concerned that the west end is not well connected to the downtown.

He asked council to support his resolution so that when the next available funding envelope becomes available, it has been identified as council's highest priority "so we can make the connection and reattach a part of our community which has been isolated from the rest of the area."

Shoemaker advocated for "an easy and safe connection" to the downtown area.

Niro agreed, adding that he believes the connection from Jamestown to the downtown needs to happen "sooner rather than later."

Ward 3 Coun. Donna Hilsinger agreed the connection needed to be made but questioned the timing of identifying this as the city's highest priority while a consultant has been hired to complete an Active Transportation Plan for the city.

"I'm struggling with calling it the highest priority when we are about to undergo a plan that is to be comprehensive and all-encompassing in terms of how we can improve active transportation across our entire community," she said.

Ward 5 Coun. Corey Gardi agreed.

"I think it is a priority but I'm not sure it's the highest priority," he said, adding that he didn't want to preempt the consultant's report.

Mayor Christian Provenzano agreed, saying he won't support the resolution until after the results of the consultant report are known.

"We have asked for this study to be done. The study will be done. We'll get that assessment and then we can prioritize as we see fit. That's our right, our prerogative, but I don't see it

responsible to prioritize it in advance. You're essentially influencing the study before the study is being done," he said.

Don McConnell, the city's planning director, said the plan will identify top priorities and he anticipates that the James Street connection will be at the top of the list.

"Regardless of that list, council always has the option to prioritize a project," he said.

But he noted that other additions and changes to the Hub Trail have come as a result of other capital works projects that have been completed recently and joining the projects often result in considerable cost savings.

Provenzano, Hilsinger and Gardi voted against the resolution.