

Time to think about complete streets

Published: **December 09, 2011 8:00 AM**

Two issues clearly dominated the recent election in Maple Ridge. Unfortunately, but not unexpectedly, cycling wasn't one of them.

However, it was nice that issues around cycling did get their share of attention during the campaign.

Ultimately, the one thing the majority of the minority who bothered to vote felt would make them happy was shopping: big boxes, in Albion to be precise. It seems a neighbourhood grocery store, medical offices, a hair dresser and maybe a local pub that they can walk or bike to just won't cut it.

They're also not willing to wait for [Target](#) and countless other stores that will undoubtedly be drawn to downtown Maple Ridge eventually, with or without some extra effort from council.

Fortunately, the Agricultural Land Commission has a say in all this, and it has indicated it will reject applications to develop the flats on the west side of 105th Avenue, where [Smart Centres](#) wants to put its big boxes.

Since the election, there have been a few letters to the editor, one claiming that this election outcome was a backlash against the left and its intention to "turn over all our roads to bicyclists."

Another pleaded with the new council: "please, no bike lanes."

But I'm sure they would appreciate having the choice to use their bikes, safely.

No more tax increases was another key concern for many voters, and we could see some fireworks on council with Corisa Bell. She's pretty smart, and her successful fight to abolish the HST shows that she's as fearless and determined as a terrier. She wants to take a look at the bottom line.

First she wants to try to undo the pay raise of council. This would save us even less than the cycling budget set aside for infrastructure improvements for next year (\$50,000), starting with about 11 cents per resident this year, and about 50 cents per resident by the end of the term for this council.

I would recommend to her to start with looking at the cost of sprawl instead. There is a lot more money to be saved by preventing further sprawl, and building up instead of out, where appropriate.

It's also more likely to get us better transit sooner, and will give us more bikable, walkable and livable neighbourhoods.

Last but not least, with more density in the town core, as well as around neighbourhood hubs, these places are more likely to attract ... shopping.

Let's talk about complete Streets. This term came up a few times at all-candidates' meetings. Complete streets is a concept that's rapidly gaining popularity in the U.S., with more than 300 jurisdictions – both states and municipalities – now having some form of complete streets policy.

It is just starting to gain traction, with Waterloo, Ont. being the first municipality in Canada so far to have adopted a complete streets policy.

The term basically says what it means: streets should be complete, or safe, for all users – pedestrians, people on bikes, on transit, in their cars. On certain roads that are part of the equestrian network, horses and riders need a safe place, too. In new subdivisions, developers are required to adhere to certain standards to provide an adequate level of safety for the different users.

In existing neighbourhoods, improvements should be made as part of upgrades done over a longer period of time.

Since Maple Ridge still has a lot of growing to do, there is great value in this kind of policy, which will help us avoid the kinds of traffic problems that we have to deal with right now on existing streets.

Different things would be needed for different streets to be complete. Each community and each street within it is unique and would need to be looked at to see what would work.

Often speeding is partly a result of road design. That's why it's important to try and get it right with the initial design, to prevent unnecessary costs later on to correct any problems.

The various neighbourhood associations that worked together on questions for candidates and posted their replies on the mrneighbourhoods.wordpress.com website obviously all are experiencing problems with increasing traffic volumes and speeding on their roads and were looking for a solution from candidates.

Our local chapter of the VACC has asked Richard Drdul, an expert bike infrastructure designer and also the principal author of the Canadian Guide to Neighbourhood Traffic Calming, to come to Maple Ridge to do a presentation. Richard has developed traffic calming plans for more than 39 neighbourhoods throughout B.C. This presentation will be held at municipal hall some time in January. The date will be announced on the district's website.

• If you would like to receive notification by e-mail, send your e-mail address to jchow23708@yahoo.ca.

Jackie Chow is a member of the Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows Chapter of the Vancouver Area Cycling Coalition.