

Memorial Drive debate continues in City Hall

BY KIM GUTTORMSON, CALGARY HERALD APRIL 22, 2009

CALGARY - A group of aldermen are moving to shut down plans to partially close Memorial Drive this summer to accommodate people walking in the lanes along the river.

The four — Joe Connelly, Diane Colley-Urquhart, Ric McIver and Jim Stevenson — will bring a notice of motion to the first council meeting in May asking that the east-west roadway remain open to traffic every day in August, when the closures are planned for.

“I appreciate we have festivals,” Ald. Joe Connelly said. “But when there are other viable alternatives out there, we can’t inconvenience Calgarians.”

Ald. Druh Farrell, whose ward includes Memorial Drive, initially wanted to block off the two south lanes of the road between 10th Avenue and 3rd Street N.W. every Sunday in August so that more people would be encouraged to walk, cycle and jog along the river.

Wednesday she said they are now looking at just closing the lanes for one Sunday as a test, at the request of the community, for a river appreciation festival.

But she doesn’t understand the backlash to the idea.

“There are over 200 roads closed for special events, a couple of those are already on Memorial Drive,” she said, citing a couple of races. “I’m just wondering what makes this one different.

“Even if Memorial Drive isn’t the right place, come up with a better idea.”

Connelly said the Memorial closure would be hassle for drivers.

“And you can see the river for 50 feet,” he said. “It’s just ridiculous.”

The idea to create a stroll has drawn mixed reviews.

Some store owners on 10th Street worry it will hurt their businesses, some drivers don’t like fewer lanes available on Memorial, while others still like the idea of having a piece of the street open for wandering.

Farrell, who said both the area BRZ and the community association were in favour of the closure when she first discussed it with them, has received mostly positive responses from her communities.

“The strong majority are supportive and enthusiastic,” she said.

But Stevenson has concerns about closing down one of the “very few east-west thoroughfares.”

He’d be alright with a one-time closure, he said, but not weekly shut downs.

“I don’t think it’s thought out very well,” he said. “There are lots of other streets that can be closed down for a block party.”

Stevenson said while aldermen were notified of the on Sunday closure for the river festival, “it did not say the other three Sundays were not going to be closed.”

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