

TO: CITY MANAGER

1998 AUGUST 19

FROM: DIRECTOR PLANNING AND BUILDING

OUR FILE: 17.901

XREF: 08.616.1

**SUBJECT: LETTER FROM MS. GWEN JOHNSON CONCERNING PEDESTRIAN WALKWAY NEAR BURNABY NORTH SECONDARY SCHOOL**

PURPOSE: To assess Ms. Johnson's proposal to close the subject pedestrian walkway.

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#### RECOMMENDATION:

1. **THAT** a copy of this report be sent to Ms. Gwen Johnson, 720 Kensington Avenue, Burnaby, B.C., V5B 4B3

## REPORT

### 1.0 BACKGROUND

At its meeting of 1998 August 10, Council received a letter from Ms. Gwen Johnson concerning problems occurring in the pedestrian walkway which parallels Kensington Avenue, near Burnaby North Secondary School (see Sketch 1, *attached*). The chief concerns related to the fact that, during the school year, the walkway is used as a gathering place by groups of Burnaby North students. The students allegedly congregate in the walkway, skipping classes or smoking out of the view of the school. Neighbours abutting the walkway have experienced various problems from the students, including verbal harassment, obscenities, property vandalism, graffiti, and litter.

To resolve the conflicts, Ms. Johnson proposed that the pedestrian walkway be closed at one end (Union Street). She indicated that she and her neighbours would be prepared to pay the cost of a short fence to close the walkway. She suggested that the measure would prevent students from entering the walkway, while keeping it accessible to local residents wishing to use it to travel to Kensington Plaza. Fourteen of Ms. Johnson's neighbours signed an attachment indicating support for her proposal.

Council referred the letter to staff for review. This report responds to that request.

**2.0 PREVIOUS CONCERNS**

The subject walkway is paved and situated east of Kensington Avenue, running from Union Street to Kensington Plaza. As seen in Sketch 1, two portions of the walkway are relatively narrow and are only accessible by pedestrians (i.e., the portions between Kensington Plaza and Georgia Street and between Union Street and the lane behind properties on the south side of Georgia Street). The middle portion, between Georgia Street and the lane to the immediate south, is a standard 6.1 metre lane that can accommodate cars in addition to pedestrians.

Prior to the current request to close the subject walkway, other area residents made similar requests in 1983 and 1995. In response to the 1983 request, staff advised that support could not be given to a closure because:

1. The walkway is extensively used by local residents, and
2. A watermain is located under the walkway; the easement would need to be protected, thus precluding the possibility of future redevelopment of the area.

In response to the 1995 request, staff undertook a survey of residents of the 6500 block Georgia Street (the prime beneficiaries of the walkway), seeking written comments on the proposed closure. The majority of those responding (19 of 31 or 61%) opposed the closure. Given this response, the walkway was retained. However, acknowledging concerns that some residents had regarding problem behaviour along the walkway (similar to those raised by Ms. Johnson), staff wrote to the OIC of the RCMP and Principal of Burnaby North Secondary School, urging them to take appropriate actions to address the concerns.

**3.0 ON SITE REVIEW**

In response to the current request, representatives of the Planning Department and RCMP visited the subject area on 1998 August 17. We were unsuccessful in our efforts to contact Ms. Johnson; however, we did have an opportunity to meet with other residents whose properties abut the walkway. As school was not in session, we were unable to witness students congregating in the area first hand, nor were we able to contact faculty at Burnaby North Secondary for their comments on the matter. Nonetheless, from our observations and discussions with the residents, we were able to draw the following conclusions:

1. Residents reported that the main “hangout” area of the walkway is by the lane between the Union Street and Georgia Street properties. Properties abutting the walkway have fences in the 5 to 6 foot range, with some displaying graffiti. Some

also have thick vegetation which, in combination with the fencing, reduces opportunities for surveillance and could make the properties vulnerable to break and entry. There is little separation between the walkway and adjacent properties - particularly those with a north-south orientation. While no students were present during our visit, it is easy to see how the area would be an attractive, convenient location for youths to congregate out of sight from the school. It is also easy to see how residents could feel uneasy or that their privacy was being invaded if groups of students used the walkway as a hangout.

2. Confirming the conclusions from the 1983 and 1995 reviews, the walkway would seem to be of greatest benefit to people living in the 6500 block of Georgia Street. Given that Georgia Street ends at the walkway, pedestrians from that block have no direct access to Kensington Avenue. Without the walkway, they would need to use Grove Avenue to get to Kensington Plaza, Burnaby North, or other westerly destinations. Other residents in the area have more direct access to Kensington Avenue and should, with little inconvenience, be able to use the sidewalk on that street for their north-south trips.

#### **4.0 PROPOSED NEXT STEPS**

While acknowledging the frustrations of area residents, staff would not recommend closing the Union Street end of the walkway as a solution. Our concerns with the option are as follows:

1. Students wanting to use the walkway as a hangout would continue to find ways to do so whether or not it was fenced. For example, they could gain access to the walkway from the Kensington Plaza end. Alternatively, depending on the material or design chosen, the students could climb over or break through the fencing. Vandalism could be an ongoing problem.
2. Attempts to close one end of the walkway would, in our view, primarily penalize “legitimate” pedestrian traffic. Further, by reducing the overall pedestrian flow, there would be fewer “eyes on the street” to observe and report on any problem behaviour occurring. Also, “ownership” of the walkway could effectively be given over to those creating the nuisance.

Another option may be to close both ends of the walkway. Again, however, the main losers of such an option would be area residents who rely on the walkway for their travels.

As noted, given that the site visit was made in August, school was not in session. Representatives of Planning and the RCMP were thus unable to observe the problems directly or speak with Burnaby North officials for their comments on the matter. We acknowledge that problems along the walkway had been reviewed in the past. Nonetheless, we believe that direct observation of the current situation and contact with school officials are essential both for fully understanding the nature of the problem and for determining appropriate solutions. To this end, we propose to undertake the following:

1. *Contact Burnaby North school officials:* We would make the contact in early September, advising them of area resident's concerns and urging them to help develop strategies for addressing the problems. A new RCMP Liaison Constable will be starting work at the school in the fall. This constable and other RCMP members could play a key role in identifying and implementing any solutions. Area residents would need to be consulted for their views and support. Also, students from the school should be asked for their ideas on the matter.
2. *Implement strategies:* Having identified strategies for addressing the problems, the next stage would be implementation. It is expected that school officials and the RCMP would take the lead role with respect to implementation. Staff would also be prepared to offer assistance, as appropriate.
3. *Monitor the situation:* In conjunction with school officials and the RCMP, and in consultation with area residents, staff would monitor the "hanging out" situation. If the situation sufficiently improves in the future, no further action would be warranted. If it does not improve, other approaches would need to be explored.

## 5.0 CONCLUSION


This report has provided an assessment of a request to close a pedestrian walkway near Burnaby North Secondary School. The request follows similar requests made in 1983 and 1995. Given that the current assessment was undertaken in August, when school was not in session, representatives from Planning and RCMP who visited the site could not directly observe the problems referred to in the letter (i.e., groups of students congregating in the walkway and creating a nuisance for neighbouring residents). From a design perspective, however, we could easily see how such problems could emerge in the walkway.

Rather than recommending closure of the walkway as a solution, the report proposes that Burnaby North Secondary School officials be contacted to help resolve the problems in September. The rationale for this proposal is threefold:

1. It is considered a prudent course of action (i.e., in staff's view, the alternative of closing the walkway would be problematic and ineffective - unless extreme measures were taken to prevent access). Also, if the results of our 1995 survey of area residents remain valid, the majority of people living in the subject area would want the walkway retained.
2. Involving the school in September would allow time to more fully assess the problem and explore other potential solutions (e.g., If there were other places for students to congregate, would they stop using the walkway? Could patrols of the walkway be increased? Could penalties or consequences be introduced to discourage youths from congregating in the walkway?)
3. The proposed approach would increase "ownership" of the problem - As area residents report that the incidents involve students and generally occur during school hours, seeking the school's participation in the solution is considered appropriate. Also, such participation should lead to more effective solutions (e.g., by way of contrast, by unilaterally closing the walkway, the City would be imposing a physical "design" solution to what is essentially a behavioural problem).

Given the foregoing, staff propose to contact Burnaby North officials in September regarding the walkway situation, as described in Section 3 of this report. We will offer support and assistance, as required. Also, we will report to Council if further actions are needed from the City in the future.

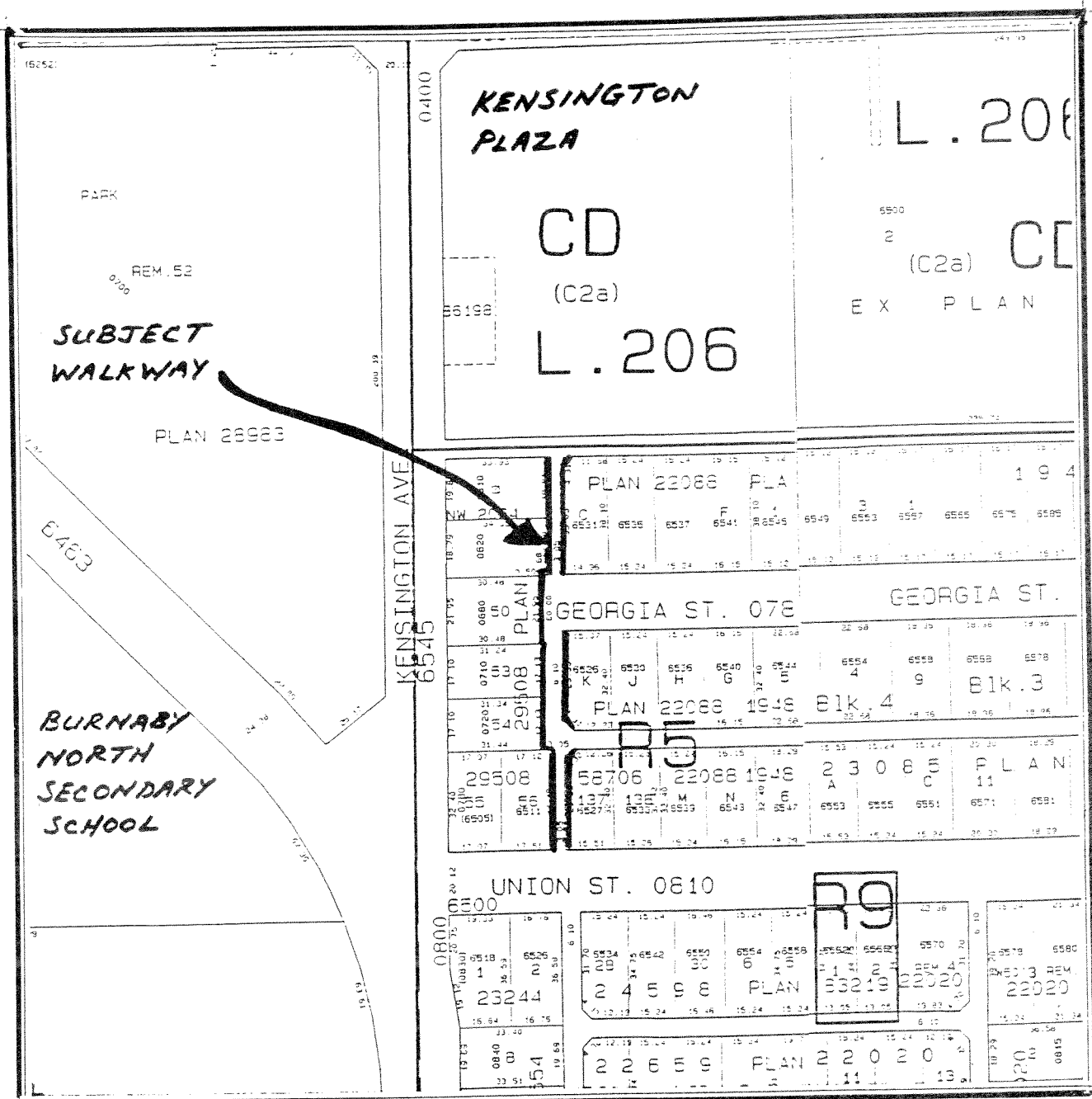
It is recommended that a copy of this report be sent to Ms. Gwen Johnson.

  
D.G. Stenson, Director  
PLANNING AND BUILDING

JF\sa

Attachment

cc: Deputy City Manager: Corporate Labour Relations  
Director Engineering  
OIC RCMP



Date:  
 1998 AUG 18

Scale:

Drawn By:  
 J.F.



City of  
**Burnaby**  
 Planning & Building Dept

SKETCH 1:

SUBJECT WALKWAY