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Wendy (Guest)

Welcome to Big G in conversation, the podcast from Inside Guelph City Hall. Hi, I'm Wendy King and on today's show, we're talking with staff from engineering and transportation and planning and building services about all things construction in Guelph this summer. We'll learn what major infrastructure projects are underway, how to better plan routes around construction and the city and ways we can all protect wildlife at the same time.

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Wendy (Guest)

Men General Manager, engineering and transportation services Reg Russwurm, manager of design and Construction, and Leah Leffler, Environmental Planner, planning and building services. So welcome everybody.

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Reg Russwurm

Hello.

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Terry Gayman

Thank you. Thanks for having us.

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Leah Leffler

Thanks.

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Wendy (Guest)

So, uh, what's that? Old joke? Ontario has two seasons, winter and construction, something like that. We're in the thick of construction season, so Terry, could you start us off and just maybe list some of the projects that are underway right now in Guelph?

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Terry Gayman

I sure can, Wendy. And you know what? You're right on the two seasons to some extent. So we certainly appreciate everyone's patience and understanding as we go through construction season because we know it can be disruptive, but it's all for good reasons, right? We need to make sure that the cities infrastructure is in great working condition so that people get the services they need, whether that's roads, bridges, water, pipes, sewers, all the kind of good stuff that comes along with construction and some of it's underground and out of sight. But it's just as important, so you know.

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Terry Gayman

Thank you in advance to everyone for for their patience. We do have a number of large projects on the go right now. The 1st that comes to mind is York Rd. So for those in the area, they would have noticed York Rd is now just recently been reopened, but it's a multiphase project. So we are reconstructing the

storm water pipes, the water and wastewater pipes and the full Rd on York Road. And and there's about four phases to the project as we work our way towards the city limits.

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Terry Gayman

So that work will wrapped up now and will be restarting again next year in 2023. So phase three is yet to come and then we continue on with that extensive work. We are also doing a number of projects right now along the Speedvale corridor. So we are replacing water mains, we're repairing retaining walls, we're adding multi use paths so that folks can travel easy through the area and we are still working towards the reconstruction of the speedvale.

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Terry Gayman

Bridge. And so those are that's sort of a suite or a corridor projects along Speedvale Ave that'll make a big impact for our city and for our businesses and residents on how they can provide services and function in the future. And so that's a lot of really good stuff there.

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Terry Gayman

Umm, we're also working on getting some work done in our downtown, so as lots of folks know, downtowns are vital to the health of a city and and Guelph has a vibrant downtown that's set for growth in the future. And as part of that growth, we need to be ready with the services again. So that's your your water and sewer pipes, your road work, all the kind of good stuff that helps service people and businesses downtown. So we are reconstructing Baker St as we get ready for the Baker Street redevelopment. And we're also working on a bigger.

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Terry Gayman

Overall, downtown revitalization plan that looks to basically program out the reconstruction of all the old services and downtown. Some of those services are more than 100 years old at this point, so there's certainly a need to make sure that those services are replaced so that the folks who use them and continue to rely on them can in fact do that. So that program is well underway, Reg, who you'll hear from later is helping lead that for the city and it's a great body of work that I'll take place over the next better part of a decade.

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Terry Gayman

So there's there's lots going on and that's some of the sort of probably the key highlights.

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Wendy (Guest)

Wow. Yeah. And I, as you were saying, obviously summer short term, some are very long term. If you're looking at a decade ahead. So how do you prioritize all of that?

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Terry Gayman

Well, that's a good question. We certainly do spend time making sure we're prioritizing the projects in

the in the best way possible and it really starts with our strategic plan. So we have a strategic plan called Guelph Future Ready and that sort of sets the tone for city staff on how we deliver public service. And then from there we have other plans that we look towards. We use bar called master plans that do sort of the long range thinking in terms of planning for growth in the long term sustainability of the city. So we have stormwater master plans and water and wastewater sewer master plans and all kinds of other master plans that help us.

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Terry Gayman

Prioritize projects, and then we really get into what's known as asset management and our asset management plan is an industry-leading plan that really helps take the condition and life cycle of the city's various assets and put them into priority. So we understand when something's in good condition or bad condition, how much more expected life that asset has, whether it's a pipe or a piece of road or anything in between. And so that really helps us figure out how do we balance everything, how do we balance it against the funding needs.

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Wendy (Guest)

Yeah.

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Terry Gayman

How do we balance it against our staff's ability to deliver the projects and how do we make sure we're making the best investments that we can for the city? We don't want to, you know, pave a road and then ten years later have to rip that back up to replace the sewers underneath. So we're trying to make as much of an integrated decision as we can and really get out the infrastructure that is beyond its life expectancy and life cycle where there's more of a risk of failure. So those are like, you know, for for simplicity, it's the older stuff generally speaking, right and and.

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Terry Gayman

In the City of Guelph, with the history we have, we have some infrastructure that that can be quite old and the seventy 8090 or 100 year old kind of range. So that gives you a bit of a sense of how we do it. And then of course, short term needs come up and we find the best way to fit those in as well as they arise.

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Wendy (Guest)

Right. For sure. Yeah. So much planning and thinking ahead for sure. So, Reg, what would be the best place for residents to find out about all the different projects?

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Reg Russwurm

Things Wendy Quality Communications is very important to the city, especially when it's something as disruptive as road and underground service reconstructions. So about a week or so, two weeks before the project starts, we'll post a construction notice on our website.

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Reg Russwurm

At guelph.ca/construction and then even for larger projects or longer term projects, we hand delivered notices to people living in the construction area. We'll also pull some signs around the area to let people know about traffic delays, detours and the expected construction timelines on our larger projects, we will create a dedicated project webpage that will reference in a lot of our notices.

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Reg Russwurm

Uh, where we make sure that current information is available and contact information is easily at hand as well. There is a handy Google map at Guelph, CA construction. Two you can zoom in and out and click about on the map. Bring up the information about the construction project you're interested in.

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Reg Russwurm

So every notice speaks to the reasons why we're doing the work. The estimated time is going to take and if any city services will be impacted like I've mentioned, we will include contact information. So if people have specific questions about how that project is affecting them or other questions, they can certainly reach out to that, that contact.

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Reg Russwurm

Uh, we know construction is tough and just eruptive, but we do our best to give the community as much notice and as much information as possible. So no one is taken by surprise.

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Reg Russwurm

But as Terry said, uh, this is work is important to support the renewal, growth and development of our city. So construction will happen.

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Reg Russwurm

We encourage residents to consult the city's website and contact us if we have any questions about construction in their neighborhood. We may not have all the answers right right away, specially if the works are not being done by the city like our third party utilities, but we'll do our best to try and find an answer.

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Reg Russwurm

Once the project is complete, we then have another 7080 years of functional underground water pipes and sewers. The service, the neighborhood, all our Rd users, people who bike walk, Dr take transit or use other methods of transportation will enjoy the upgraded roads and active transportation improvements for years to come.

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Wendy (Guest)

Umm, so I guess uh, perhaps you have answered this and the fact that you are doing advance

information and a lot of communication but is that how you make it easier for the traveling public? Cause you know, everybody's like you gotta get from point A to point B and then you forget. I mean I've I've done it myself where you know, I've announced construction projects on the on the radio and then drove on a closed Rd. You know what I mean? Like sometimes you just forget you don't realize that it's impacts you everyday right.

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Reg Russwurm

Yeah. So we do lose the notices, but like, not everybody's gonna read a notice that's put in their front door. Either we do put up construction signage.

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Reg Russwurm

Well in advance of a project. Hopefully you get people warmed up to the idea that this there is a road and we make sure our detours are assigned well, we also.

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Reg Russwurm

Make sure that folks stick to that detour. May not wander into some of the residential streets as well, where they can be disruptive to other neighbors.

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Wendy (Guest)

Right. Like sorry. Well, as all the work goes on, obviously impacts everyone, but also wildlife. So Leah, if I could bring you in, how do you attempt to limit that particular impact?

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Leah Lefler

Great. Thanks, Wendy. Great question. So as Terry alluded to, we have a strategic plan in, in the city that kind of guides the way we do business and Guelph really prides itself on being an environment first, taking an environment first approach. So when there are construction related projects, environmental planning, which is the department that I sit in collaborates with those in engineering that are leading different capital projects to identify potential issues such as.

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Leah Lefler

Wildlife crossing locations where there's known Rd mortality or where there is an opportunity to make a road more inclusive or protective of wildlife.

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Leah Lefler

So one thing that routinely happens is.

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Leah Lefler

Putting up uh wildlife signage, so if there are a lot of wildlife being noted on the road, we'd reach out to traffic and they would, we would go out and take a look and then determine whether or not it's a

good idea to put a traffic sign to alert those traveling by Rd that there is a wildlife concern in the area for larger projects like a road reconstruction, we would work to identify where there are.

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Leah Lefler

Habitats on both sides of the road that would be desirable for a species to cross and then so for example on Niska road and on Eastview Rd, we've implemented some very successful wildlife tunnels that provide safe movement under the road and don't create that road wildlife conflict.

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Leah Lefler

Yeah, it is cool. Yeah. Yeah.

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Wendy (Guest)

That's cool. Wildlife tunnels. I've not heard of that. Very cool. So a lot of times, people, especially this time of the year talking about turtles. Well, why are turtles such a big thing?

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Leah Lefler

Yeah, they are a big thing and unfortunately all of the species that occur in Ontario are listed as species at risk of varying degrees, so special concern threatened or endangered.

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Leah Lefler

And the reason for that is they're drawn to roadsides, so they nest in sandy or loamy substrate and they, you know, excavate a hole. And that's where the females lay their eggs. And they stay there.

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Leah Lefler

But further roads were constructed.

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Leah Lefler

Many long before today, and so there are roads crisscrossing wetlands that turtles call home, and so they don't really register the road. They're just doing their life business, going about their day-to-day activities.

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Leah Lefler

And also they're they're reptiles, right? So they're they get their warmth or their energy from the sun or their body heat from the sun rather so Rd surfaces are kind of desirable for that, especially early in May when they're first emerging from hibernation to cross the road. So it's kind of a a perfect disaster. They're also slow moving. So.

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Leah Lefler

Roads and turtles just really aren't a good mix.

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Wendy (Guest)

And you mentioned, uh nesting period, did you say may for that?

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Leah Lefler

Ohh nesting period so May is sort of like the beginning movement. They're kind of waking up moving on that type of thing. It can start in April as well, but really June is the most active month. That's when females are moving, doing their test nests and then actually laying their nests laying their eggs.

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Leah Lefler

But then.

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Wendy (Guest)

OK.

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Leah Lefler

July, August. Then that's when the hatchlings starts. So you'll start to see the yeah.

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Leah Lefler

Umm. Let's see. The hatchlings hatch and then start to do their movements.

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Wendy (Guest)

So is there anything you can do to protect them if they're kind of drawn to that drawn to the road?

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Leah Lefler

The best thing to do, and this is based on science and studies in Roto Cology where.

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Leah Lefler

The best thing to do is to exclude turtles from the road, so that's where the wildlife tunnels come in. But another key component to construction projects is the successful installation and maintenance of wildlife funnel fencing. So the funnel fencing basically acts as a physical barrier, so any turtle or amphibian or reptile or small mammal that enters is intercepted by the fencing, is redirected and then is directed towards that safe passage under the road through the wildlife tunnel.

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Wendy (Guest)

So that's kind of what the city is doing to protect them. Is there anything we can do as the traveling public?

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Leah Lefler

Definitely, yeah. So some residents may be aware of some large signage similar to what Reg was referring to for the construction projects to alert to.

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Wendy (Guest)

Umm.

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Leah Lefler

Traveler or traffic to the to the fact that there's the turtle movement across the road, on Maltby, and so signage is is definitely a way just increasing driver awareness to break when they're able to in a safe fashion, to break for turtles and help them to safely cross the road. Another thing to do is if if you are a driver or happen to be walking by and note that a turtle has been crushed on the road, there are existing.

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Leah Lefler

Organizations set-up to help with that, so we have contacts at Rare charitable research reserve in Cambridge. And then there's also a wildlife, a turtle specific hospital in Kortha Highlands that take in injured turtles.

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Wendy (Guest)

Sometimes we see, you know, on on Facebook or what have you that people are, you know, either stopping and waiting for them. If you have time or or helping them out. What is the Safeway to help them across?

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Leah Lefler

Yeah, a safe way to help them cross. Ideally you'd break and let them cross naturally, recognizing depending on the traffic speeds and everything else.

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Leah Lefler

And it can be desirable to to help them. Keep in mind we do have a species of snapping turtles. So you wanna make sure that you're not putting yourself in harm's way, but also doing that. So the best thing to do is to direct the turtle in the direction it's going. So say it's facing, you know, north across the road. Then, you know, help it across in that direction to where it wants to go.

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Wendy (Guest)

Giant gloves.

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Wendy (Guest)

Yeah.

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Leah Lefler

Umm yeah, so I guess giant gloves. Yeah, yeah. And just remember, I also remember people sometimes think that the shells of turtles are sort of like the jacket that they put on, but the shell is the turtle. So you need to be mindful. You don't wanna end up injuring the the turtle by, you know, yanking on different parts. So best to just let it move naturally and if needed to carefully pick it up by the shell and place it down.

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Wendy (Guest)

OK. So Terry, this might be for you and and you know maybe you can't answer this, I'm not sure. But UM, when you're setting out all your projects to be done and you've got a whole bunch on on the go as you've mentioned to us, has the money already been put aside for all those or do you, how how does that budgeting process work?

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Terry Gayman

Yeah, I can answer that, Wendy. So.

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Terry Gayman

The the city has long term forecasts, so we will refer to it as our capital budget forecast. We have them in 10 and 25 year intervals so that we are really taking that future focused long term view of when and how we need to invest in infrastructure renewal and then construction. And so we bring those plans to our City Council through the city's multi year budget process on that happens every year in our Council gets a chance to ask questions and make adjustments and and approve those budgets. So that city staff can.

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Terry Gayman

Can do the work that they need to do in terms of planning and designing and constructing the various pieces of infrastructure throughout the city. So that's that's how it works.

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Wendy (Guest)

And I would think that the weather's been pretty good this summer for construction. So are you are you kind of ahead of the game or can you tell yet?

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Terry Gayman

Well, I would say by and large, we are where we'd like to be in terms of getting work done. Every project is different depending on contractors and supply chains. There's been a number of challenges as a result of COVID and some of the things that have come from that like supply chain issues and inflation issues. But I I would like to say we're on top of it with our strategies. We're on top of it with our construction partners in the industry and and our teams are really pressing forward to make sure that we've, we've got the work.

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Terry Gayman

Underway and at the right pace, where the public can kind of really balance it all out with everything else.

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Wendy (Guest)

Yeah, I I guess that's right. Uh, 10 to forget COVID is not done with us yet. So all of that is still a possibility, right? All the delays etcetera.

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Wendy (Guest)

So Umm, I guess just just to kind of wrap up because we've we've covered a lot, uh, what would you say to people I I I guess you know maybe look at the big picture and all the improvements that are coming and and just pack your patience with some of the delays.

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Terry Gayman

I I think if I could get a couple messages across, certainly, yes. We appreciate folks understanding and patience as things can be disruptive. But by and large we are we are doing all these things for very good reason, right? These are the essential services that the City of Guelph needs. Folks need to thrive, right. And that's for quality of life for business purposes, for mobility, you name it, as you heard from Leah for Environmental Protection purposes, our infrastructure is helping us adapt to climate change, whether it's sort of been how we size things for potential storms.

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Terry Gayman

And all that kind of good stuff. So there's lots of good reasons why we invest in infrastructure. Of course, there's an economic benefit as well for local, you know, suppliers and trades and and different industries as well. So there's lots of good, good things that come from construction, but we we certainly do appreciate everyone's patience, as you mentioned at the beginning, there's sort of those two seasons where we live and and that's definitely got some truth to it.

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Wendy (Guest)

Yeah, for sure. Hey, my things to Terry, Reg and Leah, for all your information on construction, really appreciate your time.

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Reg Russwurm

Alright, thank you.

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Terry Gayman

Thanks.

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Leah Lefler

Thanks, Wendy.