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Council puts brakes on fast-tracking bike network

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Coun. Janice Lukes failed for a third time to convince a civic committee to consider fast-tracking the construction of a protected bike network in downtown Winnipeg.

Lukes (South Winnipeg-St. Norbert) appeared before the public works committee Tuesday with a proposal to have department staff prepare two plans that could be considered for implementation in 2019 — one following the approved piecemeal approach, the other following the fast-track method.

"Councillors would have two plans and they could decide, do they want to support increasing safety in downtown cycling or do they want to continue," with the current plan, Lukes told the committee.

Lukes, who used to chair the public works committee until she was removed from the post by Mayor Brian Bowman in early November, had pitched a variation of the same concept twice before: in late November and again in May. Each time, it was rejected.

Lukes had no better luck Tuesday, but it was close. Committee members voted twice — once to reject the plan and a second time to approve it — and each vote ended in a tie.

Winnipeg adopted a pedestrian and cycling strategy in 2015 that includes the construction of 10 kilometres of bike trails throughout the downtown area. City hall has only approved the construction of two kilometres of the network but the plan is already behind schedule and that portion won't be completed until 2019.

It's projected it could take five to seven years to construct the entire downtown bike network.

Lukes said Winnipeg should follow the examples set by Calgary and Edmonton, which constructed entire downtown bike networks of similar distances using temporary structures — low-profile concrete curbs, plastic bollards, paint and decorative planters — in a matter of weeks.

Lukes told the committee the public works department has previously said constructing protected routes using temporary materials was a practical and cost-effective method.

Couns. Devi Sharma (Old Kildonan) and Jeff Browaty (North Kildonan) thought Lukes' proposal was worth considering, while Couns. Marty Morantz (Charleswood-Tuxedo-Whyte Ridge) and Matt Allard (St. Boniface) said the city should stick with its current plan of incremental path construction.

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Read more by Aldo Santin.