

**Date:** September 11, 2018  
**To:** Mayor and Council  
**Author:** G.A. Plancke / Director of Municipal Services  
**RE:** Special Needs Signage Requests  
**Report No.:** MS 2018 - 37

---

## AIM

To provide Council with relevant information and historical experience with respect to the installation and requests for "Special Needs" signage.

## BACKGROUND

### Resolution 535-2018

*That Administration prepare a report outlining a policy for specialty signs that can be attached to assessment roll numbers of the homes requesting the signs and to incorporate a procedure to follow up after the sale of the property requesting the signage, or after a certain period of time has lapsed, to determine whether the sign is still necessary.*

### Resolution 545-248

*That Council refer the request of C. Heinrichs for the installation of a specialty sign to Administration for a report.*

## DISCUSSION

The Federally adopted Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) and the Ontario Traffic Manual (OTM) states the following about warning signs:

*"The purpose of a warning sign is to provide advance warning to the road user of unexpected conditions on or adjacent to the roadway that might not be readily apparent."*



Warning signs that convey the message "Blind Child", "Deaf Child" or "Autistic Child" (or variables) are not recognized by the Province of Ontario or Government of Canada as official traffic control devices and in many areas are no longer installed on public streets across the country.

These types of signs have historically been installed in the past in Kingsville, Gosfield South and Gosfield North respectively, however the signs that were installed in neighborhoods are being left in place until they are no longer serviceable (as is permitted by the MUTCD and Ontario reflectively guidelines), or the Town becomes aware that the family for which the signage was originally installed has moved from the neighborhood. At that time, the signs are removed.

Public agencies across Canada have a variety of policies on these types of signs. Some agencies will install upon request, since a compelling point can be made that a motorist in a residential neighborhood may not be aware that a special needs child is living in the area, which meets criteria for a warning sign, as noted above.

Many advocacy groups for individuals with these issues have mixed opinions on the use of these signs. Some even object to the notion of defining a child by their disability: “Blind Child”, “Deaf Child” or Autistic Child”, which is partly forced by the need to convey a readily understood message that can fit on a standard-sized street sign.

The need to convey a readily understood message also does not account for the possibility that any particular child may have several issues: They may have impaired vision and impaired hearing, for one example.

In addition, not only there is no quantifiable “standard” of any of these impairments (a child may have very poor vision, but still be able to discern some objects, another may be able to hear some sounds frequencies, but not others, but some impairments are progressive, becoming worse, or better with time and medical care.

Lastly, there is the real issue that the families of these children may move without notice to the Town, which is ultimately responsible for the installation, maintenance, and removal of the sign.

Many of the public agencies that continue to install these signs require some or all of the following from the family making the request for the sign as part of their respective Sign Installation Procedure Policies.

- A physician’s statement identifying the extent of the disability.
- Concurrence from the parents of their understanding that the sign will only remain in place for a predefined period (Typically five (5) year increments), and will be removed when the child reaches a specified age (typically thirteen (13) years of age), or no reconfirmation from the parents requesting the sign that the requirement for the sign is still valid after the initial five (5) year installation period.  
(Age confirmation may include a sworn statement of the child’s date of birth).
- Written acknowledgement from the parents of their understanding that the sign is no guarantee of their child’s safety and that they remain responsible for the monitoring of their child’s activities.
- A commitment to notify the public agency in a timely manner of any positive changes in their child’s impairments (for example, cochlear implants, use of a hearing aids etc. for children with hearing impairments).
- A commitment to notify the public agency in a timely manner of any relocation to another place of residence.

These stipulations may require a commitment of disclosing personal information that many parents are uncomfortable and or unwilling to provide, and it requires close tracking from the governing public agency utilizing various forms including roll numbers, and ownership information.

## **Municipal Policy on “Special Needs” signage:**

The Town of Kingsville does not currently have a working policy governing the installation of “Special Needs” signage.

“Blind Child”, “Deaf Child”, or “Autistic Child”, or other variations on signage for special needs children are not recognized by the Province of Ontario or the Government of Canada, and have not been approved administratively for installation by Municipal Services since amalgamation.

Many local municipalities struggle with the installation of these signs administratively, and are reluctant to install them for the many reasons listed previously.

There is little to no evidence that these signs provide any benefit to the safety of children. There is no evidence that these signs result in any behavioral changes by drivers.

Reports from many highway research programs indicate the “Non-uniform signs, should not be permitted at any time, and the removal of any non-standard signs should carry a high priority”. In addition, nearly 80% of the crashes involving children resulted from an illegal or unsafe act by the child. In reality, no traffic control device could be expected to protect a child.

Pediatric trauma physicians have cited the studies, and concur that children – particularly young children should actively be discouraged from playing near, or on streets, and that parents have the primary responsibility for ensuring the safety of their children in and around their homes. Even into their teens, and even without accounting for impairments, children have difficulty judging the approach speeds of oncoming vehicles.

The Association of Psychological Sciences based in London England make a finding that *“Our study is the first to demonstrate that the neural mechanisms for detection of looming (on-coming traffic) are not fully developed until adulthood”*.

<http://pss.sagepub.com/content/22/4/429.full.pdf+html>

## **Addressing the Safety of Young Children**

Unnecessary signs confuse and annoy drivers and foster a disrespect for all signs. Signs used in accordance with the MUTCD and OTM can and should be posted for school zones and pedestrian crossings, as well as near established playgrounds and other recreational areas, where a need exists.

The Town of Kingsville has an adopted a Traffic Calming Policy, which is designed to ensure motorists are driving at an appropriate speed, or if there is a significant amount of non-local traffic using the neighborhood streets, which further exasperates the concerns of parents in certain areas and circumstance.

The Traffic Calming Policy can be an effective means of addressing the concerns that parents and families have for their special needs children.

Parents have a vital role in providing for their children’s safety and may, in fact be the most effective means of addressing safety concerns. They have the ability to teach children that it is not safe to play in or around the street, and to discourage children from doing so without adult supervision.

## LINK TO STRATEGIC PLAN

To promote a safe community.

## FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

None at this time

## CONSULTATIONS

Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices  
Ontario Traffic Manual  
The Association of Psychological Sciences  
City of London  
Municipality of Anchorage

## RECOMMENDATION

That Council receive the information specific to the installation of “Special Needs” signage and further that Council direct administration to formalize a Special Needs Sign Installation Policy based in accordance with the following stipulations:

- A physician’s statement identifying the extent of the disability.
- Concurrence from the parents of their understanding that the sign will only remain in place for a predefined period (Typically five (5) year increments), and will be removed when the child reaches a specified age (typically thirteen (13) years of age), or no reconfirmation from the parents requesting the sign that the requirement for the sign is still valid after the initial five (5) year installation period.  
(Age confirmation may include a sworn statement of the child’s date of birth).
- Written acknowledgement from the parents of their understanding that the sign is no guarantee of their child’s safety and that they remain responsible for the monitoring of their child’s activities.
- A commitment to notify the municipality in a timely manner of any positive changes in their child’s impairments (for example, cochlear implants, use of a hearing aids etc. for children with hearing impairments).
- A commitment to notify the municipality in a timely manner of any relocation to another place of residence.

Respectfully submitted,

G.A. Plancke

G.A. Plancke  
Director of Municipal Services

Peggy Van Mierlo-West

Peggy Van Mierlo-West, C.E.T.  
Chief Administrative Officer