

# Lane change gets green light

Innovative paving option approved by Vancouver city council

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VANCOUVER - Vancouverites now have the option of bringing a little piece of the country to their back lanes.

It won't come cheap, but the innovative lane-paving option -- recently approved by Vancouver city council -- will allow homeowners to pay for an aesthetically pleasing and environmentally friendly lane design that is said to slow traffic and chase away criminal activity.

"This is very exciting," Councillor Anne Roberts said moments before the proposal was passed unanimously by council last week.

"This is going to be great for the city."

During the same meeting, council also agreed to change the standard lane treatment to a less expensive, more environmentally friendly design comprising a strip of asphalt down the centre with grass fringes.

The previous lane standard was wall-to-wall asphalt, with nowhere for rainwater to go, except storm drains.

The country-lane treatment, as it's been dubbed by the city, is the greenest lane option, but it's also the most expensive.

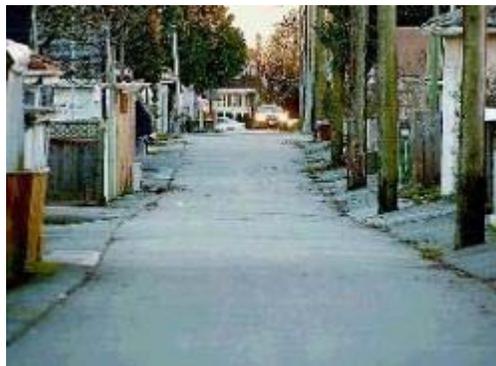
With a cost of approximately \$96,000 per block, the country lane costs about four times as much as the so-called centre-strip option, and twice as much as the full-width option.

Residents are on the hook for about 70 per cent of the bill, but payments are spread over 15 years and added to their property taxes.



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The east lane of Wiltshire at 45th Avenue shows what unpaved lanes look like currently, and ...



CREDIT: City of Vancouver, Photo: Peter Battistoni, Vancouver Sun

...above is a typical blacktopped lane in Vancouver.



CREDIT: City of Vancouver, Photo: Bill Keay, Vancouver Sun

VANCOUVER PAVES THE WAY FOR COUNTRY LANES: The old standard back lane gives way to aesthetically pleasing, environmentally friendly designs that incorporate grasses.

David Desrochers, streets design engineer for the City of Vancouver, acknowledges the country lane might be a hard sell, but said his department has been getting inquiring calls about the project since the city, at its own expense, installed three experimental country lanes around town.

Desrochers hopes people will be willing to pay the extra cost once they see the attractiveness of the design and realize the spin-off benefits.

"People like the green. They like the way the strips calm the traffic. In one area, they liked the way it chased away the prostitutes just because it's so different," Desrochers said. "It looks well cared for, so undesirable activity is no longer found in that lane."

The lane, at East 27th and Fraser Street, has interlocking, permeable pavers at both entrances, two thin strips of concrete down the middle, and grass on the edges and between the strips.

The pilot project won the American Public Works Association's 2003 Technical Innovation Award.

The country-lane design allows for more than 90 per cent of rain water to be absorbed directly into the ground, which eases the load on the city's sewer system and increases the amount of vegetation in urban environments.

In comparison, the city's former paving standard, the full-width lane option, absorbed zero per cent of rain water and sent it rushing into the city's storm drains. The city's new standard, the centre-strip design, absorbs 60 to 70 per cent of storm water and costs half as much as the full-width option.

In its report to council, the city's engineering department said it expects 20 to 25 new lanes to be constructed each year, but "only a couple" are likely to be country lanes.

For any type of lane change to take place, at least two-thirds of residents whose homes are on a lane must sign a petition saying they would like a lane improvement.