

Over the Back Fence
For Friday September 19, 2008
Approx 620 words

Parking tickets
By Alva Wood

You have to understand that the road alongside the creek was originally a deer trail. So when it first turned into a road, it still followed all the original wiggles and waggles.

And the local residents prefer it that way. They've even organized petitions to keep the road the way it is. "If you fix it up," Astrid Bowers told her husband, mayor Jake, "it will turn into a speedway for River City kids."

The residents also asked for speed bumps, in case the narrow bumpy little road wasn't enough to deter the blatting hatchbacks.

"Suppose someone goes over a speed bump and has an accident," says Henry Hill, the village administrator. "We could get sued."

Lakshmi Ramcharan looked him back right in the eye. "You could also get sued," she says, "if you DON'T put in speed bumps and someone gets killed by a speeding car."

Henry promised the road would stay narrow. And slow.

But he can't have told chief engineer Freddie Fallis. Last week, Freddie had a paving crew fixing up the road. Their machines laid down a thick layer of new asphalt. They smoothed out the corners.

It didn't look quite the same. But no one understood why until Isabella Adams drove around to drop in on Astrid. Isabella always parks in the same place, on the gravel shoulder, just off the side of the road.

Some years ago, village council decided that they had to control where people parked. In summer, too many holidayers from River City parked anywhere and everywhere. The parkland along the creek was getting damaged.

So council decided to paint a white line along the side of the road where it was safe to park. They put up signs saying that parking was permitted only off the blacktop, beside a white line.

Isabella has been parking on that shoulder beside the white line as long as she's lived in this village.

Isabella is the kind of driver who didn't even notice that the road had been repaved.

So she eased over to the side, as usual, and the car wheels dropped down about six inches off the new blacktop, with a very loud crunch from something underneath the car, instead of the usual minor bump.

She eased further over, waiting for the wheels on the driver's side to drop off the pavement, the way they usually do. But they didn't. Instead, the passenger side wheels went over the edge of the gravel shoulder.

With a sickening lurch, the car slid down the slope.

Isabella managed to prop the driver's door open enough to crawl out. To her astonishment, the driver's side wheels were still on the blacktop but the far side was right over the edge.

"I don't understand it," she says to Astrid, as she calls for a tow truck to haul her out.

Jake comes back after checking the damage. "You know what they've done?" he says, waving a tape measure. "They've widened the road about two feet. After our council specifically told them not to."

When the tow truck finally arrived, Isabella went out to meet it. She found a piece of paper tucked under her windshield wiper.

"Village of Schist Creek Bylaw Enforcement," it said. "Due to continuing damage to the shoulder, the parking of vehicles is not permitted in this area. Please park only in areas designated by white lines."

"But there was a white line here!" Isabella spluttered. "They paved over it!"

"No person shall stop, stand, or park a vehicle outside an area designated by a white line," the paper continued, "except when necessary to avoid conflicts with oncoming traffic, or to comply with the directions of a peace officer or traffic control flag person, or while operating a government vehicle or public utility vehicle while engaged in their duties, or unless a vehicle is so disabled mechanically as to render it immobile..."

"But that's my car!" Isabella rages at no one in particular. "It's disabled by your stupid paving! It's immobile! I shouldn't get a traffic ticket!"

She looked down at the ticket. At the bottom, it said, "This is not a traffic ticket, yet. It is a notice of a traffic violation, for which the normal fine is \$50. Should this violation occur a second time, your vehicle may be ticketed, and the municipality may have your vehicle towed."

The tow truck driver is busy hooking up his cables.

"Stop!" screams Isabella. "Wait! If I can get the bylaw officer around to give me a second ticket, they'll tow the car

for me!”