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Yonge Street parking proposal up for further talks later this year

By Brock Weir

A proposal to overhaul on-street parking on Yonge Street has some life in it yet.

The plan, proposed by Mayor Geoff Dawe, to reduce traffic to one lane in each direction to create two lanes of dedicated on-street parking will be the subject of further discussion later this year when Council tackles the 2017 Budget.

Council made the decision to delay a final decision on the proposal last week after raising several questions around the table they feel are still in need of answers. The delay, they hope, will provide a chance to get all the issues on the table for a full discussion before ultimately deciding whether or not the pilot will go forward.

?I would rather support it going forward, but I will certainly support the deferral,? said Mayor Dawe, outlining comparable parking plans in cottage country. ?It does give us an opportunity to look at other areas that have similar [plans]. All of them, with the exception of Huntsville, the main highway goes through their main downtown. They have been able to accommodate that as well.?

While Councillors contend the proposed plan has received mixed-to-negative response from the community, it got a boost from Aurora Public Library CAO Jill Foster at last week's meeting who said it would help support area business. Likening the Library to an ?anchor store? at Yonge Street that is not a store, she said it draws people into the area.

?I think this would position the Downtown Core as a retail and leisure destination,? she said. ?We keep talking about revitalizing Yonge Street. This I think would go a long way in achieving that. It would bring residents and visitors into the area. I think it would improve the ease and safety of parking on Yonge Street. I know many people are uneasy about parking around the Library on Yonge Street. They find that the traffic moves very quickly and they are not confident getting in and out of their car safe, and I think having a designated area [with] bump outs and parking would make that a much better situation for many people.

?I think traffic in that area is essentially reduced to one lane north and south now because people park during the day on both sides of Yonge Street and there is a lot of traffic jockeying to get into the middle. It is quite crazy midday. I think if people knew in advance there were areas coming up that were designated for parking they would start making their move and it would be a more orderly movement of traffic up and down. I think it might ease traffic rather than impede, certainly during the day. It is a trial, so why not give it a shot? It is not a permanent, costly, time-intensive. It is something that we could try for this summer. If it doesn't work, we could tweak it but at least we tried and I think it deserves that.?

While she said it was a ?bold vision? for the core, many Councillors did not share the enthusiasm, saying there were a lot of unanswered questions. At the previous week's meeting, these concerns ranged from buy-in from the Region of York, to insurance and lease issues if this leads to area restaurants taking over patio space onto the sidewalks, and how this might be aligned with the ongoing Cultural Precinct project.

One week on, these questions, in their opinion, remained unaddressed.

?I felt personally that there, if not this year, there is an opportunity to get all the questions answered at some point,? said Councillor Paul Pirri, motioning to put this off until budget time. ?I don't think everyone was opposed to this outright, but I think there are just some questions that needed answers. It is something I believe?very firmly will spur economic development and, in my estimation, it is an investment in our Downtown Core I think is very much needed.?

Councillors Sandra Humfryes and Jeff Thom were very much on the same page, adding that this time would allow for questions to be answered.

?I am looking forward to seeing this come back for further discussion and investigation,? said Councillor Humfryes, noting Council

giving the plan the thumbs-down at the previous week's General Committee meeting. ?Last week, there were a few business owners who called and were very disappointed. They were looking forward to it, they were excited about it, and they felt this was a step in the right direction.?

Councillor Tom Mrakas, however, said he received very different feedback.

?I don't have too much confidence in getting all the information back during the budget,? he said. ?This has come back to us three times with basically the same information, so I am not confident that we will get that. If we do, great, I can see where this is going. I can see that is going to be referred to the budget and we'll just do the whole song and dance over again.

?I have spoken to many residents and it is an overwhelming response from residents that they are not in favour of this. While some businesses might be in favour, the response from the residents is overwhelmingly negative to this project.?