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Traffic, parking plans hit roadblock

By Brock Weir

Proposals to improve traffic flow and increase parking in Aurora's downtown core are expected to be in the spotlight this week after several plans got snarled in a Council jam last week.

Decisions on a proposal to turn Victoria and Mosley Streets into one-way traffic corridors and reduce Yonge Street to one lane of traffic in each direction to increase on-street parking were left in the balance following last week's General Committee meeting as local lawmakers grappled on the way forward.

Staff recommended Council roll the one-way traffic plan for Library Square, which has been championed by Councillor Tom Mrakas, to be incorporated into Aurora's Master Transportation Study to address current pressures on the area, while recommending Mayor Geoff Dawe's proposal to reduce traffic lanes on Yonge to the 2018 Budget Process.

As far as the Library Square proposal goes, however, staff cautioned it might not achieve the goal earlier envisioned by Council to allow for more ?angular? parking on the busy streets, with their analyses showing it would create only four additional parking spaces.

?An opportunity currently under development for this area is the Cultural Precinct, which is bounded by Yonge Street, Mosley Street, Larmont Street, and Metcalfe/Church Street,? said Jamal Massadeh, Traffic Analyst for the Town of Aurora. ?In achieving the goal of a cultural hub, traffic, parking and pedestrian movement are critical aspects to consider. As the Cultural Precinct plan is currently under development, there is a risk that the proposed traffic management changes will influence undetermined outcomes for this area and may be premature. It would be more appropriate to allow the Cultural Plan to fully develop and incorporate traffic, parking and pedestrian goals and outcomes within the context of the current planning project.?

These recommendations, however, appeared to satisfy no one, least of all Councillor Tom Mrakas, who said staff's suggestion was not in keeping with Council's original motion to have a feasibility study on changing traffic flow.

?Part of that motion was to direct staff to put this forward to the Town Park Area Resident Ratepayers Association in addition to having a public information session, and I have never seen that happen to date and I am wondering why that direction was not followed,? said Councillor Mrakas.

Although CAO Doug Nadorozny said this was an attempt to get everything into one study and look at it in context, Councillor Mrakas was unmoved, stating he was looking for a feasibility study on whether the plan would work and ?not an opinion piece stating everything is fine the way it is right now.?

?I appreciate you want to bundle everything, but we have another motion where the Yonge Street Parking Plan has been tied to it,? he continued. ?Again, this is the second motion the Yonge Street plan has been tied to; it was tied to Yonge Street restrictions the first time and somehow it magically appeared and is tied to this plan. I am a bit frustrated.?

This frustration, particularly with the re-emergence of the Yonge Street Traffic Plan, was shared by several other Councillors, including Councillor Michael Thompson who said they previously defeated the plan and brought forward a further motion to bring it forward in 2017 to allow staff to answer questions Council members and the public alike raised on how limiting traffic to two lanes would impact the area.

Compounding the issue, he added, was a disconnect in logistics and timing.

Council is set to advance the next stage of the Cultural Precinct Plan, which could significantly alter many facets of the Downtown Core later this fall. It does not make sense, he said, to look at equally significant traffic changes to this very area a year after Council potentially approves a precinct plan.

?We're making decisions based on Library Square and the Cultural Precinct [this fall] and then this parking plan won't come back to us for another year. I agree that I appreciate the attempts to make it more succinct but I think there is some trouble there when it comes to the logistics,? he said. ?I am not convinced on the concept plan itself, but I would like to see some experts weigh in on it before I make a decision.?

Councillor Paul Pirri offered a similar view, adding: ?I appreciate staff trying to break down silos and we have talked about that on a regular basis, but I think this is a timing issue of what gets done before we get to this point.?

Some Councillors, however, wanted to take a more holistic approach to addressing the matter.

?We need to proactively seize the initiative and work with foresight and vision towards solutions,? said Councillor John Abel. ?I think there is a risk when we work in a fragmented process. It is not meeting the needs of our residents or community. We are picking at parts when really we should be looking at a major vision to go forward. I am of the opinion we should maybe consider

looking down the road five years at exactly what [this is intended] for the area. We risk not making the best decisions [when we don't] look at the long term visions or solutions going forward.?