

Aurora should look to Burlington for downtown solutions

The Yonge Street traffic corridor issues and proposed solutions are hot topics of debate in the pages of The Auroran as Town Council reviews different proposals.

In some ways this seems like a morass, with little progress made from year to year. Nobody has a magic wand that can fix everything at once.

To me, this all sounds very familiar. I grew up in Burlington close to the old downtown core and watched as the city tried a number of different road schemes to solve traffic issues on Brant Street (which is like Burlington's version of Yonge Street). The city must have spent millions over decades on studies, planning and actual roadwork. In the end they have finally configured the street so that it works. But it was a process riddled with successes and failures.

So, what did Burlington get right? One thing that works well is that despite there being only two lanes (in the core) and on street parking, there are many left turning lanes and synched traffic lights. This creates a good flow to the traffic despite what seems to be a lack of capacity. On street parking is also clearly designated and is permanent (not just for certain hours).

The second key to success was that Burlington considered the way pedestrians and cyclists use the downtown core. Sidewalks are wide and pleasant. There are bicycle lanes. It could be argued that by emphasizing pedestrians and cyclists, drivers became the net losers. But that is not really what happened. Traffic moves and there's lots of parking.

Finally, Burlington made smart decisions about its downtown that were realistic and based on the surrounding neighbourhood. There is no element of having to create an attraction for the sake of attracting people. Local people live, work and shop in the area because it is convenient and enjoyable. It is not the greatest downtown, it is not flashy, but it is pretty good. And this, I believe, is the key to unlocking Aurora's issues with its downtown core.

Here in Aurora, we seem to get bogged down with traffic plans. This may seem obvious, but Aurora should endeavor to create the most likeable downtown possible. What does that look like? While it may seem counter intuitive to decrease lanes of traffic while adding bicycle lanes and sidewalk space, these changes may actually increase the overall likeability quotient especially if drivers find that traffic flows well and parking is not hard to find.

Ultimately, our primary focus should be on creating a downtown that is well used by the community. While being concerned about traffic is also important, it should not be a fixed position. The problems associated with a busy, prosperous downtown are the kinds of problems we want. As for the future, consider that success often takes care of itself.

To see Burlington's solution, use Google street view and ?drive up? Brant Street from Lakeshore Road to Fairview Street.

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