

INSIDE AURORA: Idle Thoughts

Get ready for another parking crunch downtown, Aurora.

We're all well aware of the existing challenges of finding spots for our vehicles in our Town's core.

Parking at the Library seems to be an endless game of musical chairs as cars circle trying to find an elusive space.

This situation is only made worse when events are on at the neighbouring Cultural Centre.

Nearby churches also draw crowds for services, concerts and other activities.

And then there's Town Park. Between Farmer's Markets, concerts, baseball, skating, and other special events, it attracts people to the area all year.

Only a block away, the demand for GO parking continues to rise exponentially. I remember not that long ago when they built the five storey garage one councillor complained why they were building such an oversized structure that would never be fully used. It only took a couple of months before 'full' signs appeared early each morning on the available spaces readouts for each of the floors.

But these are all problems we're experiencing based on existing demand. There are plans afoot that will only make this all worse. First up is the Armory. Right now the Armory is only used for the occasional special event, and overall, has a pretty small impact on the downtown parking footprint.

That's all going to change.

As I write this, an announcement hasn't been made, but soon we will find out the future of this site. Whatever it is, it's supposed to be big. And big means the building will be a fully used focal point, and bring even more people to the area.

The other future challenge is not a new issue, but the expansion of an existing one; literally. The imminent twinning of the GO tracks will require tons of equipment and supplies that all has to be stored somewhere nearby during probably about a year of construction. It's inevitable that parking will be sacrificed for that.

While a hassle, that's only a short term inconvenience. But once the work is done, and the parking lots returned to their intended use, we'll then have all day 15 minute train service. Hugely convenient, that will increase riders, probably by a lot, who in turn will have to park their cars somewhere.

With this additional development downtown, Aurora will continue to a victim of its own success.

There are valiant efforts through groups like Activate Aurora and the trails folks to get people to walk and cycle more around Town. That may get a few people out of their cars when they head downtown, but it's by no means going to stem the tide.

One bit of reprieve will come shortly when the former library and seniors' centers go under the wrecking ball. However, the resulting parking lot will be only temporary. Sooner or later, this land will be redeveloped into a grand vision. Perhaps some sort of hub for education, innovation, sport or culture.

Whatever it is, it will draw crowds. And inevitably, they will drive there. So, unless the place is only open from midnight to 5 am, which is unlikely, it will add to the parking congestion.

Granted, a decision on the future use of that site is by no means imminent, so that 'temporary' parking lot may be there longer than expected.

That may buy us some time until a more permanent solution presents itself.

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