

Downtown parking restrictions set to widen

By Brock Weir

If you live in Aurora's downtown core, it might soon be easier to find a place to park outside of your own house.

On the other hand, if you are a GO commuter, it might soon become a lot harder for you to find a place to park within walking distance of the Aurora GO Station.

Councillors are set to get tough this week with on-street parking in the southeast quadrant of Yonge and Wellington. Should their decision made at the Committee level last week be ratified at Council, weekday parking on all streets bounded by Centre Street to the north, Dunning Avenue to the south, Edward Street to the east and Yonge Street to the west, will be limited to three hours.

Councillors went into last week's meeting facing a recommendation of allowing 15 parking spaces surrounding Town Park to be allocated by permit to GO commuters, as well as expanding two-hour daytime parking limits to Harrison Avenue, Connaught Avenue and Edward Street.

They rejected the permitted spots and said limiting parking on these three streets would simply create more problems elsewhere.

"The best thing to do now is just cast a much wider net," said Councillor Michael Thompson. "We need to have a stronger deterrent, otherwise they will just find another street to congest. We have heard it loud and clear from the residents in that area: it is impacting their quality [of life] so I think it is reasonable for us to include a number of streets to ensure this issue doesn't come back a third time."

Casting a wider net for many members of Council includes putting the pressure on Metrolinx, the Provincial body which oversees the operation of GO Transit. For several lawmakers sitting around the table, Metrolinx has created the problem by not providing adequate parking spaces and alternate ways to get to their stations and it is Metrolinx's problem to fix.

"They have a service they are providing and they cannot accommodate all of the commuters," said Councillor John Abel. "That becomes this neighbourhood's problem. It can be coined as a nightmare. It is an infringement on the residential property rights, in my opinion, and we have to find a way to solve this."

"This shouldn't be our problem. It has to take into account neighbourhoods. If they want to put GO service right in the heart of the heritage district, they have to provide people a place to park."

During the discussion, Councillor Abel renewed his calls for public transit to provide a shuttle service for commuters looking to catch the GO.

Councillor Tom Mrakas said he agreed alternatives need to be found and Aurora needs to ramp up the "pressure" as it creates a "burden the Town, the taxpayers and the neighbourhood" need to address.

"Why are we taking responsibility for Metrolinx's issue?" he questioned.

But, he said, addressing the issue through further on-street parking restrictions and additional permitted parking at Town Park almost puts downtown area residents at a disadvantage compared to other neighbourhoods around Aurora.

"On most streets in Aurora, you can park for 24 hours in the summertime," he said. "Almost every other municipality has a three hour limit on most streets. The fact that we are doing that in this area to curb GO parking is creating two levels of service. It is unfair to a resident who happens to live near the GO and is not allowed to park on the street outside of their house for more than three hours but someone who doesn't live in the area can go and park for as long as they would like. I think if we're going to have a policy, it should be consistent and I personally like the fact we can park on our streets because it provides residents with options when

family and friends come to visit.?

It is a concern that needs to be addressed, agreed Mayor Geoff Dawe, but a balance has to be struck. The GO Parking garage provides nearly 840 parking spaces, he said, along with 624 spots on the surface and he hears concerns from both sides of the issue.

?I get the emails from those people who can't park there and I probably get as many emails from people who can't park there as emails from people who are annoyed at commuters parking there,? he said. ?Apparently, you are doing well when you [have] almost equal sides. You're treading the line somehow. We don't own the streets in front of our houses. That is owned by the Town. It is not a popular point, but it is reality.

?All of our directors have been meeting with Metrolinx on a regular basis. They are aware of our issues and they are working on it. The problem is they are successful.?