

GO Parking headaches could be relieved after six months

By Brock Weir

Residents of Aurora's Heritage Conservation District (HCD) might be angry over Metrolinx's two-year contract to turn Our Lady of Grace Catholic Church's parking lot into overflow GO parking, but they are probably going to have to live with the headaches for at least six months, according to officials.

According to Newmarket-Aurora MPP Chris Ballard, who spoke to neighbours after talks with Metrolinx, the impression he left with was the existing deal between the operators of GO Transit and the area church was a done deal, but there might be some light at the end of the tunnel.

The existing contract, he says, a two-year contract, but one with a firm deal for six months with options to extend to 24 months. After this six month interview, there might be a window of opportunity to move the overflow parking elsewhere, including the Aurora Family Leisure Complex, an option both MPP and Metrolinx say Town Staff nipped in the bud back in March.

"You can get out of any contract, we know that, but there is a cost and therein lies the challenge," said Mr. Ballard. "Now that the Town knows we did approach them, I am hoping that temporary overflow [would be found] and I would seek the commitment of the Town and Metrolinx to take the next few months to sort it out."

Mr. Ballard was optimistic that the work set to be carried out at the GO Station, including the construction of a pedestrian underpass, would be done in short order and overflow parking would not be needed much beyond the initial six month time frame, but Metrolinx wanted to secure the OLG parking lot to use it down the line.

"[Metrolinx] understands that is not a popular place to put 120 to 130 cars and that it needs to revisit working with the Town to find a more suitable place," he said. "I would hold Metrolinx to that and I am sure the Councillors here today will hold the Town to finding a better place to park overflow cars. I am not a lawyer, but I think we're stuck with six months. I think the Town and Metrolinx can work out a solution. They are quite willing to sit down with the Town and say, "We have got the Leisure Centre, [the old works yard on] Scanlon, if it hasn't been transferred."

While Town Staff have yet to weigh in on that, the three Councillors attending Friday's roundtable with concerned neighbours said they were committed to getting those talks going.

"I will be working as hard as I can to make sure the Town comes up with a suitable location after that six months, no matter what," said Councillor Tom Mrakas to the agreement of Councillors John Abel and Wendy Gaertner.

But, whether they have to live with this for six months or two years, residents still have a number of concerns.

Among the concerns voiced by residents sitting in on the roundtable was an influx of traffic into the Town's one designated HCD, the sense that the Provincial and Federal Government can come in and be given essentially carte blanche in an HCD which has very strict guidelines of what can and cannot be done in the area from a municipal perspective, and the safety of the neighbourhood and commuters alike.

One resident, for instance, called for greater observation on the lot and a police presence to monitor the site.

"The GO Parking lot is to be open to commuters 24 hours a day from Monday to Friday," said nearby resident Bob McRoberts, who said one neighbour believes this was GO's attempt to "sneak" in a new parking lot during the summer months when many residents are away. "A member of York Regional Police was telling one of the residents that the number of car break-ins at the current GO parking structure is surprising. So, in addition to increased traffic, there will also be a potential increase in crime.

"The Metrolinx rep told me there will be no change to the lighting in the parking lot. The lady who lives next door to the lot says

that the lights are currently off at night. If that is the case, it should be quite dark for commuters who pick up their vehicles at night.?