

On-street winter parking restrictions set to return after pilot project

By Brock Weir

Aurora residents could once again face a ban on overnight on-street parking during the winter season pending a decision of Council this week.

Last year, the Town took on a pilot project which suspended traditional overnight on-street parking restrictions in favour of a new system where parking bans would only come into effect when snow was forecast. According to recommendations brought forward to Council at the Committee level last week, this brought about unintended consequences.

The pilot project allowed residents to park overnight on the roadways without restrictions during good weather, said Mandie Eddie, Manager of Bylaw Services, in her report. When a snowfall over 8 cm was predicted, a snow event was announced at which point residents had 24 hours to remove their vehicles from the roadway so that snow clearing could commence. In extreme weather conditions, cars had to be removed within 12 hours of the announcement of the extreme snow event. Drivers were required to remove cars from the roadways during the daytime as well as the night time.

As the pilot project wore on, Ms. Eddie says residents were unhappy they were unable to park on local streets during the day and a lack of compliance led to roads being full of parked cars when the snow plows came around.

Although the pilot project allowed for overnight parking on the street, the daytime restrictions were problematic and did not address the operational needs of the crews responsible for snow clearing. In addition, despite ongoing communication through every available channel, some residents and visitors expressed confusion regarding parking restrictions.

So, the old system is set to come back.

Staff will be clearing roads overnight once the snow flies to ensure residents have access to cleared roads during the morning rush hour.

Reinstating the overnight parking restrictions will reduce the number of parked cars on the road and improve snow efforts, said Ms. Eddie, adding the pilot project also drew the ire of local businesses as owners, and patrons, ran the risk of being ticketed when out running errands.

Once approved by Council, the parking bylaw will prohibit on-street parking between the hours of 2 a.m. and 6 a.m. starting November 15 and running through April 15.

It received the green light at the Committee level, but Councillors asked for more information to come forward this week ahead of final approval. Among the questions they had on whether this was time sensitive and had to be endorsed this week.

Ms. Eddie told lawmakers the Bylaw Department wanted to make sure they had a program approved to allow plenty of time to educate the public that things were going back to how they were, but Council members also brainstormed alternatives to make things easier for residents.

When allowing residents who have more vehicles than parking spaces to park on their front lawns was nixed as a suggestion, questions then turned to the ticketing process.

Snow clearing is one of the most important services that we have to offer residents and, in my experience, it is one of the ones I get the most feedback on, usually when people aren't happy, said Councillor Wendy Gaertner. The intent is only when there are snow events to be ticketing cars that are on the street.

In response, Ms. Eddie said the department's intention is to communicate when plows will be on the road, and this strategy will include a link on the Town's website to indicate when the plows will be out and running.

The bylaw, in reality, prohibits [parking] between 2 a.m. and 6 a.m., so that is really to set an expectation for drivers and homeowners not to park during that time, she said. However, there doesn't seem to be any need at this point to ticket somebody if there are no blades on the ground and there is no snow clearing taking place.

Asked by Councillor Tom Mrakas whether daytime tickets during snow events under the pilot project helped with the efficiency of the snow clearing process, Al Downey, Aurora's Director of Parks and Recreation, said ticketing doesn't solve the problem.

It is our position that we would love all the cars off the road all the time, said Mr. Downey. That would be in an ideal world and I am realistic enough to know that we don't live in an ideal world, so we are looking for as effective a program as we can. We need all the cars off the roads at some point, so that is what this plan does. If we could extend that into additional hours, that would be great, but my problem is I couldn't tell you how many hours that would be and when those would be mostly effected by it because it really depends on the snow day.

It is going to be our practice that if we aren't able to clear the road during the day, we're going to come back and do it during the

night when we haven't got the cars on the road and we will see how that works. There may be additional costs associated with that, but we're hoping we're going to be able to address residents' needs as best we can and I think communications is extremely important. Even if we don't have restrictions on parking, it would be great if you didn't park on the road.
?Ticketing a car doesn't help because it doesn't remove a car, and that is what the issue is.?