

Parking relief coming for Aurora Medical Centre patients

By Brock Weir

Patients using the Aurora Medical Centre will now be able to take one worry off their list as Council eases parking restrictions in the area of Kennedy Street and Gurnett.

Council voted last week to lift the three-hour on-street parking restrictions put in place earlier this year to combat problems caused by GO Transit commuters parking on streets in the Downtown Core.

The restrictions, however, caused problems for patients and staff at the medical building, located on Yonge Street and Kennedy, prompting Council members, centre employees and patrons alike to speak out for a solution.

Traditionally, staff working out of the Medical Centre have been parking on the street throughout the day to leave their small parking lot available for patients, many of whom are seniors. The restrictions, however, made it impractical for staff.

‘If staff park on the street, they now have to get out of their offices every three hours and move their cars,’ said resident and patron Derek Murray, speaking at Council last week. ‘That, to me, sounds very unrealistic and leads me to believe that not a lot of thought was given to the consequences of [if] this parking restriction was around an office or a building. I don’t think it makes a difference if it was in front of a residence. I don’t think I would mind if somebody parked in front of my house.’

‘There is a consequence when you put a sign up without thinking of what the next step is. The next step of that is the staff of these offices have to either pay a fee or a fine if they stay more than three hours. I would not want to be running a small business and have to have my staff leave every three hours to move their cars. I would like to ask Council to at least give some consideration on those two streets to remove those signs as soon as possible before some senior citizen has a heart attack from walking up that hill, or before some business decides to move out of there because they find it that inconvenient.’

Mr. Murray’s concerns were echoed by Michael Khalil, who has operated the building’s pharmacy, Aurora Compounding Pharmacy, in the building for 23 years.

‘This request is strictly for compassionate reasons,’ said Mr. Khalil. ‘There is absolutely no motivation other than that for this request. By placing restrictions on the streets surrounding the building, it forces me, some doctors and ancillary staff to park in our own parking lot. During busy times, this would force some patients, mainly the elderly, to park on Kennedy Street and Gurnett Street.’

‘The majority of the patients are elderly that use the services of the Aurora Medical Centre. As health care professionals, we recognize this and park for a few hours a day on the aforementioned streets. My colleagues and I would much rather park on our own lot but we make the sacrifice to park further away to make it as easy and safe for patients and the people who need these spots. There is absolutely no other reason to remove these signs.’

Despite their initial enthusiasm for the three-hour parking restrictions the men and the patients found sympathetic ears at Council who agreed that the impact on local businesses had not been given due consideration before the restrictions were implemented.

‘When we extended the parking area, the question was asked [of staff whether] anybody actually talked to businesses? and the answer was no,’ said Mayor Geoff Dawe, reiterating the concerns he expressed earlier this year before the restrictions were put in place. ‘We shoot ourselves in the foot and we will continue to do this until we look at this holistically.’

A holistic look at Aurora’s parking situation is needed, Council agreed, hoping the groundwork they have already laid for a parking strategy and a traffic advisory committee can soon bear fruit.

‘This is what happens when you react and do a blanket decision,’ said Councillor Sandra Humfries, who has championed the reinstatement of the Traffic Advisory Committee. ‘Remove [the restrictions]. This medical centre has been operating in this town for a long time and we have done nothing but make everyone upset [and] cause additional liabilities for the seniors who use this centre.’ A similar sentiment was offered by Councillor Wendy Gaertner, who pointed out this medical centre was built when Aurora was a much smaller town and their parking was likely built to standards adequate for the time.

‘Frankly, we caused a problem? by trying to fix another problem and it is up to Council to fix the problem,’ she said. ‘We just have to be logical and use our common sense.’

Councillor Gaertner was responding to comments made earlier in the discussion by Councillor Paul Pirri who said making a parking exemption or a special permit for medical centre staff would create a double standard compared to area residents who have to pay over \$200 for on-street parking permits. He said Councillor John Abel’s suggestion to lift the parking ban entirely on Kennedy Street between Yonge and Gurnett, as well as Gurnett between Connaught Avenue and Cousins Drive was a better solution.

‘We have not dealt with it well,’ concluded Councillor Michael Thompson. ‘It started as a localized problem around Town Park, we

dealt with that, and it wasn't much longer than we extended it to Harrison and Connaught because more residents came.
?There is the real possibility this doesn't resolve this issue and we are going to have it on the agenda down the road, and I also don't doubt that we may see those residents who pay for parking spaces around Town Park coming forward as well. We have to find a better global solution.?