

## Permits to ease parking woes in Downtown Core

By Brock Weir

A new parking permit system and dedicated parking spots are hoped to alleviate ongoing traffic concerns of residents surrounding Town Park.

Council is set to approve a number of measures this week addressing those concerns including time limits for on-street parking in the downtown core at certain hours of the day, a permitting system, and dedicated parking spots for nearby residents.

Methods to alleviate parking congestion in the area, much of which is overflow parking by commuters from the nearby GO Station, have been developed since the late summer.

In addition to parking permits issued at Town Hall, staff have added 15 spaces at Town Park to the current permitted parking program, said Techa van Leeuwen, Aurora's Director of Bylaw Services, in a report to Council. To address concerns of GO commuters parking at Town Park, staff is recommending a three-hour time limit restriction, Monday to Friday, between the hours of 6 a.m. and 6 p.m. Staff has also developed a program to provide specialty permits for ad-hoc overnight parking and special consideration parking for restricted parking areas.

A key component of this program are specialty permits for overnight parking allowing real-time consideration in an efficient way. It will enable what the Town calls just in time special parking considerations to replace the current manual method.

Bylaw currently experiences requests for overnight and specialty parking considerations, said Ms. van Leeuwen. These requests may include overnight requests for family and friend gatherings, seasonal recreation vehicles, special events, etc. There is a demand for special parking considerations and real-time solutions to overnight parking across Town during restricted times.

Currently, Bylaw staff manage ad-hoc overnight requests manually and are in the process of providing specialty parking consideration permits to downtown churches and halls who occasionally have a need for consideration around timed parking. These are also managed manually and are difficult to track and monitor. Implementing the upgrade would address the needs of these specialty parking considerations and manage them in real-time.

But this part of the system, she added, will be phased in gradually over nine to 12 months to allow for an education period to get staff up to speed.

Councillors gave tentative approval of the new plan at the Committee level last week and, for many, these new changes were long overdue but there was some concern that the changes didn't go far enough.

Councillor Harold Kim, for instance, said he was ecstatic that they are doing something for residents around Town Park frustrated by commuter parking, but first questioned whether 15 dedicated parking spots were enough for the neighbourhood and, second, what sets Town Park apart from other neighbourhoods who might request a similar dedication.

In response, Ms. van Leeuwen said Town Park is a unique neighbourhood as it is an older neighbourhood and many of the homes have been converted into multiple dwellings where a single driveway just isn't enough. She said she was unsure, however, whether 15 parking spaces will cut it, but it is a system that will be monitored and fine-tuned over the coming year.

For Mayor Geoff Dawe, the new policies were better late than never but once instituted, could have an impact in other areas around Aurora.

People who are parking there will find other places to park, so I think we will [need to] be aware that it is going to happen, he said. I don't know how we address that, but we need to be aware.

This was a concern shared by Councillor Wendy Gaertner who said residents were pleased with this as a first step but there is

room for improvement.

?Their suggestion, as the Mayor has said, is parking is just going to move somewhere else,? she said. ?Perhaps we can look into having a three-hour morning parking limit in the surrounding area, not just in Town Park.?

There is currently a two-hour time limit on streets in the area and that is part of the problem, said Ms. van Leeuwen, as it has driven people to park at Town Park.

?We can certainly look into implementing some kind of limitations for expanding where that limit is to other streets, not just streets adjacent to Town Park. Maybe there is a monitoring of the situation on an ongoing basis over the next six months or a year to evaluate if this program is the right program for this area and then come back to Council with some information in terms of was it successful [and if it needs to be tweaked].?