

Winter overnight parking ban to be lifted November 15

By Brock Weir

Aurora residents looking to secure places to park their cars overnight once the snow starts to fly can rest a little bit easier with Council's decision to lift the ban on overnight parking during the winter months.

The pilot project, which will see the ban from 2 a.m. to 6 a.m. lifted when there is no snow event in the immediate forecast, cleared the final hurdle at the Council table last week despite concerns raised at the Committee level earlier last month over logistics and safety.

The new Overnight Parking Program will allow parking on residential streets provided the Town has not called a snow event. According to the Town, a "snow event" will be called 24 hours before an expected snow accumulation of 8cm on primary and secondary roads, as required to provide adequate snow removal treatments. Snow event parking restrictions will continue for 24 hours after the snow has ceased to allow for plowing.

Under the new program, residents are responsible for checking the Town's website at www.aurora.ca or calling their new "snow hotline" at 905-727-3123 x4152 to see if a snow event has been called.

If successful, the program will run through April 15.

Council first approved the pilot program this past May, but its future was in doubt at Council's General Committee meeting on October 18 after Council members voiced a number of logistical concerns over the program. When they reconvened last week, Councillor Paul Pirri called for a reconsideration of the program which would have required the approval of two-thirds of Council. It failed on a vote of 6 to 3, with Councillor Pirri being joined by Mayor Geoff Dawe and Councillor Wendy Gaertner in trying to get this on the table again.

"I am not sure that this is the right way," said Councillor Paul Pirri. "I still have concerns about safety. I will take some solace knowing that if this goes off the rails staff have the ability to shut it down."

Indeed, many Councillors said they took comfort in the fact that if safety concerns crop up during this pilot project that staff members in particular CAO Doug Nadorozny would have the power to pull the plug.

For Councillor Harold Kim though this did not go far enough. Before Aurora ever got to that point, Town Staff need to set out a list of conditions and criteria "qualitative or quantitative metrics" to make the decisions, Councillor Harold Kim contended, so no one is left to second guess.

"If the situation arose where I thought there was a safety or a liability issue for the Town, I would suspend the program pending full information and ultimately bring it back to Council," said Mr. Nadorozny. "I would take action in the interim period since a lot of these things are judgement calls. I would want Council supporting my judgement at that time."

"We feel confident [staff] can do it, so let's see what happens," added Councillor Gaertner, noting her reservation from the previous week.

Other Council members had few reservations going forward. For Councillor John Abel, who initially brought this concept forward in the spring, he has found "misconceptions" in the community about this program that need to be addressed.

"Most people say, 'I can't believe you're lifting parking restrictions overnight. When the plow comes at night, but that is just entirely wrong,'" he said. "We have to make sure that people are clear: we're not allowing cars to be there and secondly most of our snow plow operations are always done starting at 6 on our main collector roads and going to the secondary roads. There are no snowplows during the evening anyway. That concern can be easily addressed by just simply stating those simple facts and getting the communication out. It will take a bit, but it is a good strategy going forward. I think it is reasonable to try it."

"If it works the way it does, we will have our streets plowed and people will be able to have some of the parking overnight when there is snow on the ground and when there is no snow falling and that is basically what it is. It is letting our residents use their best judgement to use the streets for parking when they have company, when it is obvious there is no snow or plowing being done. It is done in Ottawa, which has two to three times the amount of snowfall. It is a huge city, they have challenges, but they get it done and have for years. It is our turn to do that for our residents."