

Yonge Street parking plan to get closer look this spring

By Brock Weir

A pilot project to limit traffic on Yonge Street from Wellington to Kennedy Streets this summer to one lane in each direction with the rest dedicated to on-street parking will come in for a closer examination this May after Council fell short of endorsing the plan last month.

Council faced a recommendation to approve the pilot project, which is slated to run from June to October of this year. However, this recommendation was changed to approval pending a report with further comment, which is expected to come forward on May 3.

The concept, which was originally floated around the Council table last year by Mayor Geoff Dawe following the 2014 Municipal Election Campaign, could see traffic on Aurora's main traffic artery reduced to one lane in each direction from Wellington in the north to Kennedy Street in the south, with the two existing outside lanes transformed into on-street parking and landscape features.

"I somewhat facetiously suggested we defer this to 2032 so we can have the full 16 years to analyse it, like we have been beating ourselves up about Library Square, but I won't do that," said Mayor Dawe, after Councillors Sandra Humfryes and Michael Thompson offered some reservations on an outright endorsement of the pilot. "If anyone looks at Yonge Street at almost any time of the day, it is a single lane in each direction. It is already there.

What this project was to do was to make it official. I do believe we should have, if not unanimous support from Council, there should be more support than there is right now."

Mayor Dawe suggested the report be referred back to staff for more information so that everyone is comfortable moving forward, but approval was made subject to the May date.

Speaking against the recommendation, Councillor Thompson said he supported the concept as "anything we can do to enhance our core" is worth investigating, but he still had lingering questions about the merits of this particular plan.

Compounding the issue, he said, was the fact the Region of York has yet to weigh in on the plan.

"I think this could be a good idea, but I don't know," he said. "Why don't [municipal and regional traffic experts] give us their perspective on possible potential. I just don't think we're treating this in a business-like manner. In any pilot project you need to identify the intention of the project, what it is founded in, the evidence to support it, and how you are going to measure success. You can't just say, 'I have an idea, so let's roll it out as a pilot project and then we will gauge it at the end.' That is not the way to run the Town."

Councillor Tom Mrakas expressed a similar view. While he said it could be a good idea, having those question marks still in the air made it tough to make a firm decision. The same concerns were offered by Sandra Humfryes who said she liked the idea, but wanted to see some movement on increasing efforts to divert traffic onto Industrial Parkway, originally intended to be a Yonge Street bypass.

Nevertheless, the pilot project had its supporters.

"We all want to see some sort of revitalization and, at times, I think we will almost accept anything," said Councillor John Abel. "One of the ideas was to create a pedestrian-friendly atmosphere and I think this is what it speaks to. We almost seem to get to a point where we're going to do it and then we step back. I feel this is another case [of] 'you want to cross the ocean but you don't want to lose sight of the shore.'"

Added Councillor Pirri: "I am happy to move forward with this right now. We have identified a plan we're going to move forward with. Now that we have identified the plan, we can go to the residents, see what they think about the plan, see what their concerns

would be, and then come back for more consultation. Once the consultation has happened, it comes before us and we [determine] whether or not we're going to move forward.?

Ahead of the May report, Municipal Staff plan to roll out an awareness campaign, including a public open house on April 19 and undertaking door-to-door consultation with Yonge Street business owners.