

Community Planning Permit system reflects resident, business concerns

Aurora's Community Planning Permit System, a proposed plan which will help the Town steer future development in the historic downtown core is expected to move forward to the next level this month, reflecting concerns expressed by residents and business owners alike last year.

Council this month is poised to approve an Official Plan amendment allowing the Downtown Community Planning Permit system to take root, with the system itself subject to final approval at a future meeting of Council.

The Community Planning System is designed to streamline the planning process in the historic core along Yonge and Wellington Streets, bringing the zoning, site plan, and minor variance applications into one streamlined approval.

In addition to streamlining the process, it's also intended to set out what the Town expects from developers at the outset, helping the Town to manage future growth in the area responsibly.

Through the Downtown Community Planning Permit, the Town is proactively setting the criteria for development in the Downtown and positioning itself to responsibly manage future growth in the area, says Policy Planner Dania Asahi Ogie in a report before Council at this week's Committee of the Whole meeting. The Downtown Urban Design Study prepared by Urban Strategies recommends several development standards for the Bylaw area. The Bylaw area will see increased step-backs, heights, and setbacks; the new standards are to make sure that the taller buildings introduced into the Downtown will have less impact on the pedestrian realm, the heritage building facades, and the street-wall of Yonge Street.

When the proposed plan was last before residents at a Public Planning meeting in October, feedback was largely positive. While some area residents voiced concern on the impact infill developments might have on their nearby heritage homes, including structural, and the potential influx of traffic and parking issues, many said bringing more people into the area while preserving the heritage facades of existing buildings was the right way to go.

Key comments on the project have included a desire to have the [plan] incorporate progressive growth-oriented policies by introducing greater densities based on current and future housing demands, support the protection of the downtown heritage facades through step-backs, and to promote mixed-use development and encourage walkability in the area as a means of revitalizing the Downtown, says Asahi Ogie in the report. All of these suggestions received from the public have become fundamental principles built into the Downtown CPPS.

Parking could prove to be a bone of contention, however, as business owners have long expressed concerns about on-street parking and a perceived lack of parking in the general area.

Minimum parking rates have been lowered in the Plan to encourage more walkability and decrease dependency on the private automobile. But, should any proposed development impact existing municipal parking spaces, the developer will be required to allocate public parking spaces within the proposed development.

With the vision of creating a Downtown that is vibrant, the proposed reduction in the minimum residential parking rate for apartment buildings is a necessary change to achieve the vision laid out in the Official Plan for the Downtown as a place to live, shop, work, and play without reliance on the private automobile. The minimum parking rate policy in the bylaw is intended to increase pedestrian porosity in the area leading to higher foot traffic and pedestrian activity. In addition, this policy aligns with the Province of Ontario's direction on reduction of parking in strategic growth areas like the Major Transit Station Area.

The proposed Downtown Community Planning Permit System positions the Town proactively in terms of setting the vision and framework for downtown growth and revitalization. The development and design standards in the proposed bylaw build off the alternative development concept from the Downtown Urban Design Study to create a public realm that is pedestrian friendly and

sensitive to the heritage facades while introducing sensible growth in the area.?

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