

Commuter parking moving northward concerns Council, neighbours

By Brock Weir

If you are a GO commuter, how far away from the GO Station are you willing to park and still walk to catch your ride?

That was a question posed by Councillor Paul Pirri at the last Council meeting as lawmakers approved a new bylaw that puts significant restrictions on the length of time you can park on Downtown streets surrounding the GO Station.

Council unanimously passed a bylaw which would limit on-street parking to three hours from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on several stretches of roads in the immediate vicinity of the GO Transit Station, including Mosley Street, Church Street, Metcalfe Street, Harrison Avenue, Connaught Avenue, Kennedy Street East, Cousins Drive, Royal Road, Centre Street, Gurnett Street, Victoria Street, Wells Street, Larmont Street, Cameron Avenue, Walton Drive, and Edward Street.

However, some residents are worried that these restrictions, designed to keep commuters from parking on these neighbourhood streets, will only create problems north of Centre Street.

?I suggest that those commuters who are in the habit of parking away from the GO Station will soon discover Catherine Avenue, Fleury Street, Maple Street, maybe even Spruce Street,? said Catherine Avenue resident ? and former councillor ? Bob McRoberts. ?With the reconstruction of Catherine Avenue this summer, it could get interesting.

?I realise that if [or since] GO provides a parking lot on Mulock Drive that it could help Aurora. Also, if a 404 Interchange is built at St. John's Sideroad it should help Aurora. In the meanwhile, a bylaw is before you. The bylaw will restrict parking or eight blocks to the south and only one block to the north of the GO Station. Given your concern for commuters parking their cars just eight blocks away on Dunning, I am sure you can envision them parking only two blocks away on Catherine and beyond. Perhaps a better balance of streets could be included in the bylaw.?

This was a view shared by members of Council, but some were cautious about being too ?reactionary? as being reactionary over parking in this area might have contributed its own problems in the past.

According to Techa van Leeuwen, Aurora's Director of Bylaw Services, while the bylaw was passed at the end of June it could be up to a month before it is implemented, as numerous new parking signs need to be installed. However, if Council saw that the restrictions, once implemented, were causing mounting problems in other areas, Ilmar Simanovskis, the Town's Director of Infrastructure, said it could take up to three months to get further parking bans in place, allowing a month for staff analysis, a month to make it through Council, and a further month to get the signs installed.

?This approach to managing the traffic is going to create additional problems and is not recommended,? he said. ?It is more of a reactionary response to the issue than trying to step back and take a proactive approach, which I appreciate Council would much rather see happen.?

But that is easier said than done. When Councillor Pirri questioned how such a problem could be approached in a way that was not ?reactionary?, Mr. Simanovskis said he did not have an answer for that.

?My preference would be to be a little more broad with our policies and look at some other opportunities,? said Mr. Simanovskis. ?However, I do understand the pressures we have in this area and the traffic management issues we have in this particular community. I don't have a good answer for you, I just want to communicate the message that any changes we make are difficult to be made on the spot. Everything has a timeline. Managing expectations is probably our biggest tool moving through this process.?

Looking over the bylaw, Councillor Pirri conceded it was a result of an ?entirely reactionary process? resulting from changes Council made to parking around Town Park.

?In the future we have to do a better job of understanding the repercussions of what we're going to be doing to make sure we're not going to be jumping from one street to another in an attempt to fix a problem that, in essence, we have created by fixing another one.?

While Councillor Wendy Gaertner, Tom Mrakas and Michael Thompson agreed that spillover onto Catherine Street was likely ? and Councillor Mrakas proposing extending the restrictions north to Mark Street right then and there ? Mayor Geoff Dawe said proper consultation is the answer.

Questioning whether area schools, churches and businesses had been consulted over the parking bans, and receiving the answer that no, they had not, Mayor Dawe said that is the way to make something non-reactionary.

?The motion came forward to Council as an answer to a specific issue within a couple of streets south of Town Park. By taking it down to Cousins we impact the school probably,? he said. ?We passed a bylaw and that will certainly address some residents' concerns in the area that certainly have to be addressed, but it will also create other issues.?