

Future of one-way traffic on Centre Street questioned by Council

It has slowed traffic and occasionally confounded drivers, but the future of one-way traffic on portions of Centre Street in Aurora's Heritage Conservation District is being questioned by Council.

Last week, Council received a report on the future of traffic calming measures in the Centre Street area after nearby residents raised concerns about traffic infiltration and non-compliance with the one-way driving restrictions.

“The Town has received multiple requests from area residents to evaluate the effectiveness of the existing one-way section of Centre Street, particularly related to vehicles travelling the wrong way,” said Michael Bat, Traffic Analyst for the Town of Aurora, in a report. “A poll was initiated in February 2019 by staff to gather opinions from residents and the results are generally in support of Option One – Do Nothing.”

Should Council ultimately heed the results of the survey, this would result in maintaining the existing traffic calming measures while continuing to press the York Regional Police to monitor and enforce non-compliance.

Council, however, might go another way when the matter comes before Council for final approval at the end of the month. Upon receipt of the report at last week's General Committee meeting, Council members questioned the survey, noting the low response rate of just 17 per cent of impacted residents.

“This is a tough one,” said Councillor Wendy Gaertner, who sat on Council when the one-way traffic restrictions were first put in place, noting the lacklustre response rate.

In response, Mayor Tom Mrakas said Council had limited options on how to proceed.

“We can either do nothing, we can eliminate the one-way or we can basically tell police to go and sit there 24 hours a day and make sure no one is going the wrong way,” he said. “Beyond that, I am not really sure what we can do. It is up to this body to decide what to do and put a decision forward and we'll decide.”

Councillor Rachel Gilliland said she agreed Aurora can't ask York Regional Police to have an officer sitting there at all hours of the day monitoring the situation.

“It would have been nice [if the report] had alternative recommendations? to lengthen one-way or to remove it so we can make this choice,” she said. “As far as I am concerned, I would remove the one-way.”

Councillor John Gallo was less clear on his preferred option because, in his opinion, the survey results just weren't there.

My standards are really high and I wouldn't consider this a success in terms of engaging the public. Sometimes I wonder even though 13 ? 80 per cent of the people ? want it, have we really gotten a cross section of what that neighbourhood wants? I would hazard to say we probably didn't.?

At the end of the day, however, Councillor Gaertner said the matter appears simple on the surface: measures in place now are just not working and residents are unhappy.

I don't think we ever signed this area properly, she said. I think there needs to be a sign at Yonge and Centre, perhaps, that gives the map of the traffic calming area and very clearly says one way only begins at Spruce Street. I think we do need some ticketing. I don't think we need much, but we need to get the word out that sometimes people are being ticketed. I feel strongly about this signage and just making it obvious and perhaps using red to get people's attention.?

Councillor Harold Kim said he agreed with this.

Given that the residents who are most impacted have clearly stated at least from the survey they want the status quo, I am fine giving them that choice, he said. I agree with Councillor Gaertner that if there are signs on Yonge Street that will help ameliorate the situation on Centre Street, I think that would be a great suggestion.?

Councillor Kim said he would vote for keeping the status quo, a sentiment shared by Mayor Tom Mrakas ? at least for the time being.

The reason I am for the status quo right now is moving forward there are going to be some changes in the area with regards to Metrolinx and the grade separation [at Wellington and the GO Station for a traffic underpass] and, during construction, Centre Street is going to be heavily used and the traffic flow is going to change in the area due to that construction, he said. We should wait and see what's going to happen with that before we implement any changes to Centre Street especially. Ultimately what happens with that grade separation could [impact] Centre Street.?

By Brock Weir