

GO Parking deal shouldn't go beyond six months: Council

By Brock Weir

MetroLinx and Our Lady of Grace Parish have struck a nearly \$400,000 deal to house extra parking in the church's parking lot from Aurora's GO Station to accommodate an overflow of commuters.

But, following a public outcry from neighbours, Council has voted to do "everything possible" to ensure the contract between the Provincial body overseeing GO Transit and Aurora's only Catholic church is nipped in the bud before the contract comes up for renewal after the first six months.

Councillors petitioned Mayor Geoff Dawe to call a Special Council Meeting on August 29 after numerous residents from the Heritage Conservation District (HCD) came forward with their concerns over traffic and safety, and following a meeting with MPP Chris Ballard who informed Councillors the Town had turned down a potentially similar parking deal at the Aurora Family Leisure Complex.

Last week, they voted unanimously to "commit to do everything possible to limit the use of Our Lady of Grace Parking to a six month period."

So, how are Town Staff going to do it? Offering MetroLinx a selection of parking spaces around Aurora "including Sheppard's Bush, the Aurora Family Leisure Complex, the parking lot of the former Aurora United Church, and up to 70 parking spots that could be built following the demolition of 12 Industrial Parkway South " potentially making the need to park at Our Lady of Grace obsolete.

"At this point the LSRC (Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority) has looked at the north parking lot (at Mary Street) and they have identified a potential 46 spaces," said Mayor Dawe of MetroLinx using Sheppard's Bush, noting the present state of the parking lot is gravel without parking lines. "There are some concerns with how to operate that parking lot in winter [but] I think that can be worked through."

This was welcome news to many Councillors.

"While it may not satisfy all of the needs [of commuters], it certainly can provide some relief," replied Councillor Michael Thompson. "I think those in need of parking would use that site prior to using Our Lady of Grace. Certainly we should make all effort to try to explore it [and seriously look at] offering that as overflow parking."

Heading into last week's meeting, Council members faced a number of recommendations to address the issue, including putting additional traffic control measures around the church parking lot along Catherine Avenue and Mark Street, requesting York Regional Police look at traffic management from 5 a.m. to 7 p.m., and getting a further report back to Council on the Town's inventory of parking spaces that can be made available to MetroLinx for overflow from a future reconstruction project.

"MetroLinx has confirmed that they have executed an agreement with the Church and are unlikely to move away from that agreement," said Ilmar Simanovskis, filling in for CAO Doug Nadorozny who was not at the meeting. "They have recognized the significant community concerns this arrangement has created for the local community and are committing to an extensive communication and safety plan.

"As the Town is not party to this agreement, staff are only aware of principles of the agreement that have been communicated through various channels. Staff will be revisiting parking needs with MetroLinx to determine if there are any opportunities to accommodate these vehicles in other locations and if MetroLinx will consider alternative solutions to the current agreement with the church."

Future activities at the GO station, including double-tracking to accommodate all-day two-way GO Service, will likely impact future parking further, he added, and MetroLinx is "open to negotiating other parking arrangements with the Town" but nothing has been

set in stone yet.

For many Councillors, however, the time to act is now.

?I think we need to come up with a solution on how we can move forward and come up with an alternative solution for this temporary parking,? said Councillor Tom Mrakas. ?I think it is very important for us to sit down here tonight and figure out what we as a Council can all agree on are areas that we would be willing to offer as temporary parking. If we can come up with that, we can sit down with Metrolinx and hopefully there is that opportunity.?

For Councillor John Abel, an obvious solution was parking at the Aurora Family Leisure Complex.

?In addition to the other suggestions, which I agree with, I did go by several times to the Leisure Complex, and counted 200 spots there and there were about 30 cars that were there. That is a prime spot for 100 cars. I would like to see that being explored as probably one of the prime spots. It can take a lot of volume.

?We have also seen from emails and correspondence there is going to be further work down the road?.In my mind, when we have new commuters, more service during the day, 15 minutes all day service for both ways, we should be looking long term at solutions. Our Lady of Grace could become a permanent parking spot rather than a temporary if we can't work with the Region and Metrolinx, and the Town [towards a solution].?