

Metrolinx nixes six-month limit to Our Lady of Grace parking

By Brock Weir

As recently as last month, local lawmakers at the municipal and provincial level said they were confident a controversial move by Metrolinx to lease out the Our Lady of Grace Catholic Church parking lot for overflow commuter parking would be limited to six months while other options are explored.

Metrolinx, the Provincial body overseeing GO Transit, however, has poured cold water on that idea.

According to a report before Council this week, Metrolinx intends to keep overflow parking at Our Lady of Grace (OLG) for as long as necessary.

Metrolinx was requested to provide a response on limiting access to the church parking lot to only six months provided the Town can create additional capacity elsewhere in the Town, said Ilmar Simanovskis, Aurora's Director of Infrastructure, in the report, which was approved without comment at last week's General Committee meeting. The response is that there is intent to use the parking facility for the duration needed to complete the pedestrian underpasses. There is a commitment that the initial work for the underpasses will be completed quickly and that the temporary parking needs will be limited to the shortest time frame possible based on the completion of these tunnels.

The Aurora GO Station on Wellington Street East is currently under construction laying the groundwork for two pedestrian underpasses on their existing land to better accommodate existing pedestrian traffic, as well as an influx expected when two additional tracks are completed down the road.

Over the summer, Metrolinx' decision to lease out the church parking lot on weekdays was met with heavy criticism from the surrounding neighbourhood and Council alike after it was learned Metrolinx initially approached the Town to lease out a portion of the Aurora Family Leisure Complex parking lot to handle the overflow, an overture that was turned down by staff without any input from Council.

As a result, OLG, through the terms of the lease, will earn \$15,000 a month through the deal, which could last for up to two years. In response, a Special Council Meeting was called this past August to address the issue, with Council directing staff to do everything in its power to limit the OLG parking situation to six months while offering up alternative locations around town, including the Leisure Complex, Shepherd's Bush, and the parking lot of the former Aurora United Church.

That power, however, has been nipped in the bud.

Mr. Simanovskis' report provides an update on a variety of other issues related to the parking situation, particularly worries from neighbours on the impact the parking deal might have on local traffic flow, both within the Heritage Conservation District surrounding OLG as well as the beleaguered Yonge and Wellington intersection.

Metrolinx has been working with staff on the current traffic management plan and have committed to provide any additional traffic management signage as needed based on further staff review, Mr. Simanovskis reported. There was also a discussion on the impact of left turn lane restrictions planned for the morning and afternoon peaks at Yonge and Wellington Streets.

This was not expected to be problematic for the temporary parking accommodations as commuters accessing the lot would most likely be either travelling straight through the intersection when moving northbound or make a right turn from Wellington Street when travelling from the east. It is also expected that more users would be accessing the site from the north direction approaching along Yonge Street.

More welcome news to commuters and members of Council is the fact Metrolinx is exploring shuttling and micro-bussing as options to address some of the congestion to, from, and around the Aurora station.

Further discussions are required within Metrolinx to determine if shuttling is a viable and workable option for Aurora, said Mr. Simanovskis. They are looking at this option for other sites as well.