

Metrolinx response leaves Councillors disappointed?

By Brock Weir

Metrolinx's decision to stick with their plan to use Our Lady of Grace Catholic Church's parking lot was met with disappointment around the Council table.

Local lawmakers tasked staff with doing everything in their power to find alternative municipal properties for GO Transit's governing body to park vehicles displaced by the continued construction of pedestrian underpasses at the Wellington Street East station following an outcry from neighbours around the church (OLG).

Metrolinx recently struck a potential two year deal to lease the parking lot on weekdays to the tune of \$15,000 a month for the church. The lease has the option to extend after the first six months and it was the intent of Council to find these alternatives before that six month period was up.

But, GO has informed the Town they have no intention of moving from that parking lot for the duration of the lease.

Their response passed the previous week's General Committee meeting without comment, but generated some disappointed chatter by the time they reconvened for Council.

"I am a little bit discouraged at the fact Metrolinx has outright denied it without us even giving them any other alternative parking spots," said Councillor Tom Mrakas, who asked Ilmar Simanovskis, Aurora's Director of Infrastructure, whether any alternatives were presented before the rejection.

Those alternatives had not yet been offered.

"The conversation I had with the project lead on this is they are not going to give up the access to that parking lot unless they are having confirmation of other parking spaces required," said Mr. Simanovskis. "Their other comment also was they are going to need more parking anyway. So, even if we offer them parking they still may need additional parking. They are open for discussion but they are not willing to give anything up if they have it within their program at this point in time."

Councillor Mrakas said his disappointment was compounded by impressions Metrolinx officials left in a meeting last month between themselves, MPP Chris Ballard, and municipal representatives on how to tackle this issue.

"When I was sitting there, it seemed they would limit it to six months if we offered those alternatives and that doesn't seem like that is the case," said Councillor Mrakas. "I am disappointed."

Rather than just focusing on their disappointment with the news, Councillors took the opportunity to check in on outstanding issues, including lighting the parking lot at nighttime, which was raised by Councillors Jeff Thom and Michael Thompson. While the report presented by Council said neither Metrolinx nor OLG had intentions of installing new lighting, it did not say whether they were going to extend the use of the lights already in place.

"I have been to the site at different times in the day just to see how it is being utilized," said Mr. Simanovskis. "I haven't noticed the lights being on at this point in time, but I can enquire as to what the status of that is. If they have any complaints I am sure they will be quick to respond."

A further report will be coming back to Council soon on the impact the new parking deal has had on the surrounding neighbourhood so far.

Relief to commuter parking overall and a move which could provide commuting alternatives will soon be in the offing.

According to Mayor Geoff Dawe, who had a recent conversations with Metrolinx, their planned new GO Station on Stouffville Road with 850 parking spots serving the Richmond Hill line is still on target for the end of 2016. A further new GO station on the same line, this time on Bloomington Road near Highway 404 is still on track for the end of 2018.