

New policy would allow sidewalk patios for restaurants, cafes

By Brock Weir

Spring is here, and in the coming weeks, more people frequenting Aurora's restaurants are going to want to take their meals outside and patrons may have more opportunities to do so if a new pilot project gets off the ground.

Councillors are due to approve a pilot project this week which could give restaurants on busy thoroughfares like Yonge and Wellington a bit more elbow room in extending patios out onto sidewalks.

According to a report by Marco Ramunno, Aurora's Director of Planning, beginning May 1 through October 15, restaurants and cafés could, if their applications are approved, extend their businesses out onto sidewalks as long as it doesn't get in the way of pedestrians or pose safety concerns.

"The policy would assist in achieving the Town's vision for the Aurora Promenade," said Mr. Ramunno. "It is intended to increase the visibility of downtown and all of the Promenade and create an economic benefit for restaurants. This proposed policy would be applicable on a Town-wide basis as long as the criteria in the policy can be met. Staff believe that the proposed policy would be beneficial to both the Town as well as private restaurants and businesses."

Councillors approved the policy at the Committee level last Tuesday and it comes forward to Council this week for final approval. At the general committee meeting, however, not all Councillors were on board with some questioning the impacts such a policy could have on the surrounding neighbourhoods.

Mayor Geoffrey Dawe, for instance, said more information was warranted at when these patios would close compared to the rest of the establishment to keep in mind noise bylaws.

In a follow-up report this week, however, Mr. Ramunno notes that the Outdoor Patio Policy would not supersede any existing Town policies, such as the Noise Bylaw, which would curb noise between 11 p.m. and 7 a.m., and this would be the trump card for those concerned about noise.

Others, such as Councillor Buck, said it underscores a conflict between what Council is trying to achieve, local lifestyles, and whether the two can ever fit.

"On the one hand, we have a policy encouraging intensification and getting people back into the Downtown Core and that being the answer to revitalizing the centre of Town," she said, noting she had already received complaints from residents over noise coming from restaurants in the Yonge and Wellington area. "We're not living in Paris. Yonge Street in Aurora is not a square with cafes. It is not the European lifestyle. We might like to enjoy the North American lifestyle with all the charm of the European lifestyle, but that is not where we are living."

Councillor Buck also pointed to a possible disconnect in having this policy allowing local restaurants and cafes to encroach onto municipal rights of way for patios when other businesses, such as retail stores, have to follow stringent rules on whether or not they can have sandwich boards outside their doors promoting their business and for how long.

Councillor Michael Thompson also expressed some reservation about the plan. Clearer parameters were needed, he said, in outlining the minimum and maximum requirements, space needed, and so forth for applicants so they don't have to go through the whole process only to find out their applications fell short. "Guiding principles" would address the points raised about noise, hours of operation, and any potential concerns that might come up in the future.

"If someone is considering this idea, [they would then] have a basic understanding that nobody is wasting their time," said Councillor Thompson. "They know the clearance they will need, restrictions and times. It is good to at least manage those

expectations to some degree for anyone who is considering this.?

More fulsome in his support for the policy was Councillor John Abel, noting that just four establishments have expressed interest in the pilot project.

?I don't see that we're being flooded,? said Councillor Abel of the applications, noting the space allowed would likely only result in one or two extra tables. ?It boggles my mind that [noise] would be an issue with people screaming and yelling. I really think this blends to create some pedestrian traffic.?