

Return of winter parking restrictions prompts call for alternative solutions

By Brock Weir

On-street parking will once again be prohibited between 2 a.m. and 6 a.m. starting November 15 following a Council decision last week.

After a pilot program last year paved the way for on-street parking during winter months except in cases of announced snow events, Aurora will be reverting to restricting parking on all Town streets between 2 a.m. and 6 p.m. to allow snow clearing.

While the Town's Bylaw Department will only enforce the bylaw when snow plows are out on the job and their blades are on the ground, non-snow events will see the department 'educate' drivers parked on the road when snow clearing is not taking place. Reverting back to previous standards follows a report on the pilot project which outlined a number of problems that might be encountered should the pilot project continue. These, as The Auroran reported last week, included the timely clearing of the roads to concerns offered by businesses on patrons being unable to park on the street and come in to shop after a snow event had been called during the day.

'Staff [have] stated that to provide the best possible service for snow clearing we need to revert back to that overnight restriction,' said Councillor Tom Mrakas. 'I think that is a very important thing for us to remember. The bigger issue is making sure we provide the best possible service when it comes to snow clearing for our residents. We have to make sure these streets are clear and safe.' From the outset, Councillor Mrakas said he saw two separate issues on the table: first, removing the snow itself and, secondly, addressing a parking issue.

Residents, he said, have 'legitimate concerns' about being able to park on the streets overnight during the winter in circumstances where they have no room to park elsewhere.

'Quite frankly, I think it is a [planning issue],' he said. 'Past Councils have allowed certain developments with not enough parking spaces, but we are where we are and there isn't enough parking for some residents.'

Bringing up a suggestion made earlier this term by Councillor Harold Kim which would see a 'just in time' parking solution whereby residents would be able to get overnight parking permits through the Town's website or an app, he said this would be a good alternative to explore down the line.

This solution could soon be in the offing. According to Techa van Leeuwen, Aurora's Director of Customer Service, the software to bring something like this into place is a capital project in the 2018 Budget. Once approved, she said it's a system which could be implemented fairly quickly.

For Council at large, however, the pros of reverting back to the previous system outweighed the cons.

'This is a very logical way to go for us compared to what happened last year,' said Councillor Sandra Humfries. 'It was nice that you could park any time when there wasn't any snow, but the second something happened, we would have a situation come up where we had to get off the roads and it really did impact every single snow notification. Going back to this is fine, but hopefully there will be some Just in Time parking to help those people in preparation for the future.'

Added Councillor Jeff Thom: 'A lot of residents were in favour of the pilot project and I think they were in favour of it for reasons other than snow clearing, but staff made it pretty clear that the best time to clear snow [is between] 2 ? 6 a.m. The best efforts are going to be made every night when it snows to clear those roads.'

From the perspective of Councillor Paul Pirri, it is Council's mandate to do what is best for the community as a whole and although reverting back to the previous system 'will inconvenience a few people' it is indeed best for the community.

'What is most important to me is that at 7.30 in the morning when people are going off to work [they] can exit their subdivisions, get to work safely without any snow, not have to worry about whether or not their neighbour had to take their car off the road overnight, or their streets are well plowed,' he said. 'I think this is the best option. It disappoints us when this happens, but ultimately it happens fairly often. There is always someone inconvenienced by some decisions, but ultimately I think this is for the good of the Town.'

A similar view was offered by Councillor Michael Thompson who said staff were tasked to come back with an assessment of the pilot once it was completed, and this is the result of that assessment.

'Staff stated in their report that reinstating the overnight parking restrictions with revised education and enforcement efforts would better serve the residents and, to me, that is based on their professional opinion, their conclusion, and I support their reasoning and the end result.'

It might not, however, be the end of the story.

Councillor Harold Kim told staff and his fellow Councillors he wanted to discover a 'happy medium'.

'Given that snow events only happen six to eight days out of the year, and due to economic forces, not every family can have three or four parking spaces,' he said.