

## Review of proposed Yonge Street parking overhaul gets Council nod

**By Brock Weir**

A proposal to reduce Yonge Street traffic to a single lane each way along portions of Aurora's Downtown Core leaving the rest for on-street parking was taken to the next level by Council last week.

Councillors signed off on an investigation looking into the feasibility of a concept floated by Mayor Geoff Dawe which would see traffic flow reduced on Yonge Street from Kennedy Street north to Wellington Street, to one lane in each direction, accommodating space devoted to parking.

The idea was sparked on a recent visit to Niagara Falls to attend a conference for the Federation of Canadian Municipalities. Mayor Dawe said what he saw encouraged pedestrian traffic and, after talks with many local business owners, there was support here as well for something similar.

"I talked to many business owners on Yonge Street, I talked to the Library, I spoke with the Commissioner of Transportation Services at the Region, the President of York Rapid Transit with respect to busing, and all of them were on the positive side of the ledger," he said, noting the Commissioner of Transportation was "more pragmatic" on the proposal.

One concern, he added, was the age-old Aurora question if the Town is going to "take away" a lane, how will traffic flow be accommodated at rush hour. That solution could lie in encouraging traffic flow onto Industrial Parkway.

"For many, many Councillors there has been much said and little done on talking about Yonge Street," said Mayor Dawe. "We either have to say we're not going to do anything about Yonge Street, or we're going to have to come up with something bold. I would much prefer we do the bold route."

Going the "bold route" was supported by Councillor Tom Mrakas, who said the Town has been looking at a solution to this problem for over 20 years, and was more than ripe for suggestions.

"I think this is something we can look into and have staff possibly come back with ideas on how to implement it," he said. "I am sure there are a lot of problems that could arise from emergency vehicles. I would like to see bike lanes, and I am sure there are other things we would like to see implemented as part of this."

A similar view was offered by Councillor Wendy Gaertner, who said Aurora already has a good tool in its belt to help the Downtown Core in the form of the Aurora Promenade Plan.

"I would certainly like to be a part of the Council that can finally figure out the revitalization of the Promenade," she said. "I think [the Promenade Plan] will go a long way over time to help this area and I am interested to know what staff will come up with. It could be very exciting. The concern I keep hearing over and over the traffic is parking issues and we need to figure out how to sort that out."

Other Councillors, however, said they were in favour of going forward with investigating the plan but had concerns that there could be off-shoot problems if this becomes a reality.

"It is bold, certainly, and there is significant support and also some initial opposition as well," said Councillor Jeff Thom. "I think bringing it forward to staff to make recommendations is prudent, and we're not going to commit to anything yet. Currently, residents and commuters who maybe don't live in Town may use ancillary roads [such as Mosley Street, Church Street, and Victoria Street] to circumvent that intersection. It would be important to make sure we look at those streets because I would imagine that with less room for traffic to move through north and south that they may go east or west."

Whatever ultimately comes out of staff's investigation, and whether or not Council decides to move forward with this new parking concept, it all has to be done from a 'big picture' perspective to ensure all wheels currently in motion are turning together, according to other Councillors.

'I think residents are tired of doing everything piecemeal and us being hamstrung in previous Councils as well,' said Councillor Harold Kim, noting dialogue needs to take place with landowners as well. 'We need to do these things simultaneously so they can have a bigger impact, as opposed to small steps. We won't be able to fully realise the benefits of that step without being in conjunction with the other steps.'

Added Councillor Michael Thompson: 'This has got to be taken in context with all the other initiatives we have so that we don't solve one problem by creating another.'