

Short-term ideas considered for downtown parking crunch

Finding solutions both short-term and long-term for the parking crunch in Aurora's historic downtown core are being eyed by Council following the recent approval of the Library Square redevelopment.

This week, sitting at the Committee level, Council will consider a laundry list of recommendations to address area parking woes, including shared parking agreements with nearby churches and businesses and a new traffic stop at Yonge and Church.

The recommendations are the result of an ongoing study carried out by BA Group which, according to Michael Bat, Traffic Analyst for the Town of Aurora, has found there is sufficient parking supply to support future parking demand, assuming all events within the Aurora Cultural Precinct are not run simultaneously.

Nevertheless, the recommendations before local lawmakers this week present a number of short-term solutions to alleviate parking pressures.

Future parking demand were estimated based on two scenarios: day-to-day activity and event activity, said Bat. The day-to-day activity is anticipated to follow a consistent daily pattern, while the event activity may or may not occur at a regular schedule. Based on the analysis, the Parking Study concluded all of the event capacity scenarios will put a strain on the on-street parking supply when the events are run simultaneously; and on a weekend midday if all events are run simultaneously at 100 per cent capacity, the study area parking supply cannot satisfy parking demand and the on-street parking supply will be at capacity.

However, this is considered the ultimate worst-case scenario [and] the Town will coordinate events to ensure sufficient parking capacity is available.

Among the short-term options for the parking crunch is to use the existing parking supply and the proposed 78 parking spaces included in the Library Square redevelopment, as well as 36 new on-street parking spaces on Church and Victoria Streets that will result from the redevelopment; and enhance and encourage use of the existing parking supply.

A proposed medium-term solution is to build additional parking on-site through acquiring additional property.

Longer-term options include a new surface parking lot and underground parking off-site in conjunction with development, and consolidating area parking.

The area surrounding the site and the downtown area consists of many small, private surface parking lots that serve individual businesses, reads the study. Over time, the Town can slowly transition from private parking lots to larger, shared public parking lots. Consolidated public lots would increase efficiency, design quality and access opportunities. This would also increase the area parking supply, which would be more efficient in accommodating the existing future parking demand.

But staff currently recommend the short term solution of enhancing the existing parking supply.

The Parking Study recommends [enhancing and encouraging use of existing parking supply] by entering into a shared parking agreement with either the United Church or Trinity Church, or both, to address short-term parking, said Mr. Bat. The staff parking demand for the site would be accommodated by the existing area parking supply, making more efficient use of available parking and reducing the need to build excess parking. The reduction in staff parking demand will free up site parking spaces for visitors.

As part of traffic management strategies, the Parking Study recommends signaling the intersection of Yonge and Church Street and installing an all-way stop at the intersection of Victoria Street and Church Street.

A new signal at Yonge and Church, according to the study, will improve access to and from Church Street while offering pedestrians

another way to cross Yonge Street, improving pedestrian safety in the process. Drawbacks cited in the study include increased delays for traffic on Yonge Street, while causing headaches for users of the existing Yonge Street driveway adjacent to the intersection. The study also indicates that traffic volumes on Church Street do not warrant a signalized intersection.

By Brock Weir Editor Local Journalism Initiative Reporter