

?Substantial transit hub? in Promenade raises alarm bells at Council

A potential ?substantial transit hub? within the Aurora Promenade area to accommodate future growth raised alarm bells around the Council table last week.

Going into the March 1 General Committee meeting, lawmakers faced a recommendation to ?work with York Region staff to explore a substantial transit stop/hub? within the Yonge Street Promenade area given its ?proximity to Town Park and the significant investments made at Aurora Town Square within the heart of the Town.?

The recommendation was spurred by York's review of its Regional Official Plan (ROP) which has put a priority on ?complete communities? and encourages ?employment close to existing and future transit service and opportunities for people to live and work in their communities.?

?Town staff reviewed the draft ROP and essentially have no concerns,? said Edward Terry, Senior Policy Planner for the Town. ?Our only suggestion would be the consideration of a substantial traffic stop/hub within the Promenade on Yonge Street, taking into account the proximity to Town Park and the significant investments made [at Town Square] within the heart of Town.?

But this suggestion raised questions around the Council table, with Councillor John Gallo pressing staff on just what a ?substantial? transit stop or hub might look like.

?I just have a feeling it is going to be pretty significant,? he said.

Acting Planning Director Lisa Hausz told Council that the Town has until the end of March to provide feedback on the ROP and the recommendation to Council is to ?raise awareness to the Region that in the future we would be looking for something within the Promenade area.?

?Not necessarily right in the historic area, although that is kind of implied in the wording, but it would be somewhere in the Promenade based on the growth of the Town and where growth is identified,? she continued. ?The process right now is to make sure that the Region is aware and that it is part of their plans going forward.?

While Councillor Gallo said he had no issues with having discussions, the phrase ?substantial transit stop/hub? made him want to ?take a step back and say, ?Do we really need this?'

?If we do need it, what is the impact? What's the whole parameter around it? Maybe what are the next steps? I am trying to get a picture in my mind on where we're going with this.?

Next steps, said Ms. Hausz, include looking at where such a facility might fit in.

?It also doesn't mean we necessarily agree that this is the place for it, or that we even want it there,? said Councillor Gallo.

These were sentiments shared by Councillor Michael Thompson who said he was not supportive of the motion as it was written as he had ?no definition or idea? on what is meant by ?substantial transit station/hub.?

?The mind can conjure up all kinds of images,? said Councillor Thompson. ?I can look to Newmarket and Yonge Street and some of the hubs they have right down the middle of the street as they get to Davis and Yonge. When I read the report, I was hoping to get some definition or idea on what we mean by [the term] or even just some images because surely someone has to have some thought or concept around that.

?Before I vote and say, ?Let's explore this idea.' We would like to have some general sense of what we're really talking about? What

does it really look like? Conversations previously, I use the example that if a developer came to our podium and said, 'I am going to build a substantial complex and I am looking to explore this opportunity,' we would all say, 'What do you mean by substantial?' I feel the same way with regards to this.

From the perspective of Mayor Tom Mrakas, a 'substantial transit hub' is, to his mind, Aurora's GO Station.

'Maybe if we looked at asking the Region to continue to consider the Aurora GO is a substantial hub and for them to continue building it as a substantive hub, I think maybe that is the direction we ask the Region to look through [their review] instead of adding another transit stop or hub,' said Mayor Mrakas. 'I think we're too small of a Town to consider having two basically substantial hubs within our Town. When I look at that and I see the wording [of the recommendation] I think of the GO Station and I think that is an area we need to concentrate on, in creating that transit hub, and I think that's where we have to push the Region to make sure there is a focus there [to ensure] that transit hub is the best possible hub for our community and the Region as a whole.'

'There's no intentions of bringing buses right down the middle of Yonge Street. That's just not going to happen in the Town of Aurora. We have already had those discussions.'

By Brock Weir
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