

Winter on-street parking plan approved after frosty reception

By Brock Weir

A plan to lift winter restrictions on on-street parking was approved at Council this week after getting a frosty reception at the Committee level.

Councillors approved a plan to suspend overnight on-street parking restrictions this winter in a pilot project following Council approval this past spring.

With the green light, the plan is proceeding on schedule and is set to run from November 15 through April 15.

?During the pilot project, restrictions on overnight parking will be lifted,? said Jamal Massadeh, Traffic and Transportation Analyst for the Town of Aurora, in his status update to Council. ?During a snowfall, when the Town requires that vehicles are removed from the roadway to facilitate thorough plowing, [and] bylaw officers will be on duty to initially warn and later enforce the parking bylaw, laying the Interfere with Snow Removal charge [starting at 6 a.m.]?

But, the report outlined further challenges including that an increased on-street parking demand could ?increase conflict and compromise safety,? which raised alarm bells among Councillors.

Following up with the City of Ottawa on a similar program, Councillor John Abel said these safety concerns include crew snow removal crews having to move around cars if the owners do not make provisions to get their cars out of the way by 6 a.m.

?I voted for this in the past and I remember sitting here discussing an email I got from a resident who got a ticket because they didn't uphold the winter restrictions, but I have to say in the twelve winters I have been here I have had very few complaints from residents and I am having misgivings about this because it seems it is going to be very confusing for the residents,? said Councillor Wendy Gaertner. ?I will make my decision next week but the bloom is off the rose for me with this. I can see so many problems.?

Also voicing concerns over the pilot program was Councillor Harold Kim who said he was worried that unlike other pilot projects, there weren't ?conditions and thresholds? already in place to measure the success of the program, such as the number of customer complaints or snow events in the season.

?I find that any program that is trial and error and see how it goes, a lot of times there are a lot of unforeseen events that you can't potentially foresee and I find it is usually wise to have set thresholds and criteria so it is easier to check off,? said Councillor Kim. ?I would recommend we have those prerequisites in place so we aren't required to just do trial and error.?

But, there is a cancellation option allowed for if issues like public safety or ?just the non-workability of the program? crop up, contended Ilmar Simanovskis, Aurora's Director of Infrastructure. Among the considerations are if there are ?excessive snow accumulation? making snow management on the roads difficult and complaint volume, but putting a threshold in there would prove difficult.

?More a consideration [is if] the program moving to a non-workable state, in which case we pull the plug, or can we actually respond to the issues, modify our responses to allow for a more efficient operation, and make the program work throughout the year,? he said. ?I think it is going to be more of a feedback loop to see what happens. The first snow event is going to be telling to determine how many people actually are aware of the program.?

The first step in communications, he said, is putting a flier on windshields that are non-compliant to boost awareness of the program communicating the need to be off the road by the appointed hour and subsequently monitoring if the behaviours change. If not, the bylaw enforcement could be ramped up and the program evaluated.

Some Councillors, on the other hand, questioned who makes the ultimate decision on suspending the program if these problems, particularly public safety, arise. Ultimately, it would be Council's decision, they were told, but with only one Council meeting set for December and January apiece, that could be an impractical solution, said Councillor Michael Thompson, who said the decision to make that call should rest with staff.

Councillor Thompson also took issue with a note in the report stating staff are still waiting to hear back from the City of Ottawa regarding the success of the program. Although the program was approved last May, he expressed dismay when the bylaw department said they only started those conversations last Tuesday, the day of last week's General Committee meeting.

?As a Councillor, I can only make judgements based on the information provided,? he said. ?I would have thought since part of the rationale moving forward with this is we wanted to mirror some of the successes other municipalities had.?

Nevertheless, the pilot project still found favour among other Councillors, particularly Councillor Abel, who brought forward the idea in a notice of motion in the first place, citing ticketing carried out last year when there was no snow on the ground.

?This motion [has been coming] for a long time,? agreed Councillor Tom Mrakas. ?Do I agree with it and want to move forward

with it? Definitely. I think it is a good idea to try out as a pilot. It has been a long time and I would have liked to have seen some of that data also. I think it would have been easy to get some of that data from Ottawa on how many damaged vehicles a day they have on a yearly basis, how many problems they have with the windrow just to get a sense of how it works within Ottawa to make us feel a little more comfortable on making that decision on moving forward.

?It would have been great to have that data and there was more than enough time to get that.?