

Yonge and Wellington is at the root of traffic problem

By Brock Weir

With the future of traffic calming in the historic downtown core settled, at least for now, some Councillors say renewed energy should be focused on what could be the real root of the problem ? traffic congestion at Yonge and Wellington.

Congestion at Aurora's busiest intersection has long been a source of debate through Town Planning, developing the Aurora Promenade Study, as well as the more recent moves for Downtown Revitalization. No concrete solutions, however, have been borne out of these discussions.

Now as new developments start to take shape just over the northern edge of the intersection, now might be the time to be proactive about finding one, say some Councillors.

?The Region and the Town have spent a lot of energy looking at the intersection over the years and we have done a number of reports and studies have been completed, most recently through our master transportation work over the last year,? said Ilmar Simanovskis, Aurora's Director of Infrastructure. ?We did a timing and configuration of the entire north-south section of Yonge Street to make sure that the lighting right up to Yonge Street was synchronised to maximise efficiency. There was also a period where there were left turn restrictions at that intersection to try and streamline that traffic, so there have been a number of changes and alterations to that intersection and a number of studies done. We're also continuing to review that intersection going forward.?

Mr. Simanovskis made his comments this month during a discussion on the remaining traffic calming features in the downtown core. One of the primary reasons traffic calming measures were installed was complaints from neighbours that drivers were using the neighbourhood streets to avoid the traffic artery. Some, however, have argued that the traffic calming only made matters worse in the intersection.

?We have created and exacerbated the problem by this traffic ban,? said Councillor Evelyn Buck. ?It was never anything but a political boondoggle. Imagine the problem we would have on Wellington and Yonge if every road exiting off Yonge Street had obstructions placed onto it to deter people from turning off Yonge Street and finding another way home. We would have every bit of traffic on Yonge Street.?

The call to revisit the intersection was made by Councillor Michael Thompson, who suggested now might be the ideal time to deal with it as property owners look to redevelop key properties in the area, including the Centro condominium already under construction on the northeast side of the intersection, the plans for a multi-storey residential and retail complex to replace the existing Liquidation Warehouse plaza on the northwest side, and a proposed apartment building adjacent to the recently sold Aurora Post Office building on Wellington Street East.

?I would like to see us put energy more towards a proactive approach to that intersection and maybe through discussions with the Region look at what is the optimised solution to that intersection and plan forward, and look over the years at how we are going to realise that,? he said.

?I recognize that as it stands now, physically there are limitations but we know at some point there will be some development at that corner and that may provide those opportunities. I think we need to continually spend that time and look for the optimal solution and let people know that this is what Aurora is going to look like in the future and we're actively working towards a proactive solution that will help lessen the impact.?

While Councillors ultimately supported the motion to keep the status quo as far as traffic calming was concerned, their resolution the previous week to seek further community consultation stemmed from the new buildings slated to become parts of the neighbourhood. Some Councillors wanted further studies made on how the new residential buildings, particularly Centro and the one proposed for Wellington Street would impact traffic flow in the neighbourhood, and still felt the same way.

?I do think we should set a deadline for once those buildings are up, we will re-investigate the situation,? said Councillor Paul Pirri.

Added Mayor Geoffrey Dawe: ?I supported the concept of going back and looking at the kind of impact [they] would have [but] we always have an opportunity to go back.?