

Bike share program feasibility study underway in Aurora

A feasibility study to implement a bike share program in the Town of Aurora, which will provide residents and visitors with access to a fleet of bicycles at strategically located docking stations, is underway.

"I think it's something that the Town needs to do as we continue to grow and look at providing more pedestrian-friendly areas, especially within our Major Transit Station Area (MTSA) and our downtown core," said Mayor Tom Mrakas.

Worried that the Town lacks the proper infrastructure to implement the bike share program, Ward 2 Councillor Rachel Gilliland suggested that a Regional approach would help address foreseeable concerns.

Councillor Gilliland noted that the Town does not have key performance indicators or data on similar programs in other neighboring towns and shared her concern that bikes may be abandoned in a smaller town like Aurora.

"Don't get me wrong, I love the initiative, there's great things about it. I feel like we're putting the cart before the horse here," she said.

In speaking with the cycling community, issues with how procedures would be enforced and where bikes would be left was one of the foreseeable concerns, Councillor Gilliland said.

"There's just so many moving parts here, and that's why a Regional initiative may work to our advantage."

A six-month implementation plan feels a little "aggressive," she said, adding that it may be better to get data first to see if the bike share program is something that can be collaborated upon with the Region.

Providing a detail-oriented motion has been one of the constant requests from Council in the past few months, said Mayor Mrakas, explaining why he wanted to avoid making a generic motion for the bike share program.

Ward 4 Councillor Michael Thompson said he is in support of exploring the idea and would like to see that the plan is expandable.

"Should it prove successful in Aurora, it could be then expanded in Newmarket or even the Region could also then look to join in or work in concert with us to develop it on a larger scale as well," he said.

Ward 5 Councillor John Gallo also expressed support of the bike share program; however, he noted that an implementation plan is something that can be done down the line and that a feasibility study should come first.

"And once we've determined that, we can figure out partnerships, we can figure out costs, and we can figure out an implementation plan. So, generally, I like it, I want to move forward with it, I just think we're going a little farther than we need to accomplish a feasibility study," he said.

Six months is a sufficient amount of time to bring back a report to Council with an updated summary of research, but it may not be enough time to provide a full and comprehensive report as hoped for by Council, said Robin McDougall, Director of Community Services.

"We'll do our best effort to get that back within six months, but it may not be as comprehensive as some of you may like, but it might give you a heads-up as to what our next step would be," she said.

Ward 6 Councillor Harold Kim said he looks forward to seeing how much information returns in the report.

Ward 3 Councillor Wendy Gaertner said she is in support of the idea, but shared similar concerns as Councillor Gilliland and that many factors must be taken into consideration.

Ward 1 Councillor Ron Weese said he is all for active transportation and questioned whether the bike share program was seen as a priority in the Parks Recreation Master Plan.

McDougall replied that the Parks Recreation Master Plan does speak to active living but the Active Transportation Master Plan speaks more to the interest and viability of the program.

Staff have been directed to provide a report in six months after consultation with the Active Transportation and Traffic Safety Advisory Committee and the community, including business owners, to ensure that the program meets the needs and interests of all stakeholders.

By Elisa Nguyen