

BROCK'S BANTER: The Warm-Up Act

By Brock Weir

"I am hoping that the tone and tenor tonight is that we're looking forward to seeing how we can all come up with a solution to this," said Mayor Geoff Dawe at the start of last week's Council meeting.

There wasn't supposed to be a Council meeting until September 13, but this summer has been full of surprises.

But, nevertheless there was a Special Council meeting called for last Tuesday due to popular demand – at least by popular demand of some Councillors and residents of the Town's Northeast Heritage District.

It was a direct response to the August controversy over GO Transit leasing out Our Lady of Grace Catholic Church's parking lot for overflow parking ahead of Metrolinx' planned pedestrian underpass at the historic Wellington Street East station.

The issue had been the subject of considerable chatter since the beginning of August, not limited simply to those residents most directly impacted by the lease deal – and traffic expected to infiltrate their community in the weeks ahead – but by politicians, the community at large, and armchair politicians on social media.

So, last Tuesday's meeting was the first opportunity for politicians and voters to vent their collective spleens, but that was quickly nipped in the bud by the guidelines set out by Mayor Dawe.

And quite rightly so.

The most pertinent issue of the day was not the question of who at Town Hall knew what about Metrolinx looking for a municipal property to house some of its commuters' overflow parking.

It was not about whether or not Town Hall knew Metrolinx was looking to shell out tens of thousands of dollars to do so.

Or why the Town, without the knowledge of Council, turned down the deal in the first place.

Or why, when Aurora residents are facing a potential tax increase of over three per cent next year on the municipal portion of their tax bill alone, why Town Hall did not bend over backwards to come up with some sort of solution that would have brought a significant cash flow into municipal coffers to offset the burden on the taxpayers.

The paramount concern was finding a solution for the residents in the Heritage Conservation District (HCD) most likely to be adversely affected by the solution Metrolinx devised for itself and how to limit its impact on the neighbours.

At the end of the day, they are stuck with having nearly 200 commuters make their way into their neighbourhood, which is already littered with traffic control measures to limit traffic in the area in the first place, for at least six months before Metrolinx and Our Lady of Grace consider exercising their options to renew.

The plan, of course, is to dot Wellington Street with bold signage leading commuters like a trail of bread crumbs to the witch's oven, otherwise known as Yonge and Wellington, prompting them to dash northward over the hot coals towards their ultimate destination, Our Lady of Grace, before having to hot-foot it back to the GO Station to catch their early morning train.

The signage is well intentioned, but I think any Auroran who has lived here for any length of time will agree that it is just not going to happen. The intersection, despite the best intentions of countless proposals that have lived and died, remains a nightmare and commuters, unless they are passing through for the very first time, are going to do their utmost to avoid it.

For many, this will mean swinging north up Industrial Parkway past the Aurora Leisure Complex where, if the Province has a sense of humour, they might erect a sign saying "If the Town accepted our proposal you'd already be parked here!?" two lefts onto St.

John's and Yonge and, finally onto Mark or Catherine to get to the church.

More likely it means winding their way through the HCD simply for the sake of time.

For now, however, there is plenty of time to address the remaining questions as the Town is now tasked with doing an inventory of parking in the Town's Industrial heart to satisfy the parking demands of Metrolinx customers.

Council committed to do "everything possible to limit the use of Our Lady of Grace parking to a six month period," so it will be interesting to see what parking spaces are actually earmarked to make their solution far more attractive than anything Our Lady of Grace might have to offer.

Will it be proximity? Councillors, commuters and even Aurora's Provincial representative have said Our Lady of Grace is a bit of a hike to the station – or will it be cost?

Metrolinx has a deal that will generate Our Lady of Grace \$15,000 a month for the use of their spots. Will it take undercutting that offer to get Metrolinx to look at any alternate solution?

If so, that is a loss for the church, and it might be a loss from what the Town could have gained from the original deal. In my opinion, the public should know why this is the situation Council now finds itself in.

With last Tuesday's Special Council out of the way, Aurora Council's pump is primed, they've already had to shake off the summer doldrums, and they should be raring to go as Council resumes its regular schedule this week. Hopefully these questions and many others will be answered before the fall is out.