

Downtown parking plan needs community, business input: Councillor

Various measures to help alleviate a parking crunch in Aurora's downtown core should be guided with the help of the surrounding community and area businesses.

This, according to Councillor Michael Thompson as Council members took their first look at several short-term and long-term solutions proposed to ease a perceived parking shortage in the area surrounding Library Square.

As The Auroran reported last week, Council this week is set to approve the exploration of shared parking agreements with area businesses and organizations, including Trinity Anglican Church and Aurora United Church, to help shoulder the parking burden once Library Square is complete.

Recommendations presented by staff also include the installation of a new traffic signal at Yonge and Church Streets, along with a new all-way stop at Church and Victoria Streets, subject to future budget approval.

A working group has been struck to discuss and manage parking related issues in the downtown core, including Library Square. But, according to the report before Council by Michael Bat, Traffic Analyst for the Town of Aurora, this group is comprised of staff from various municipal departments, including Planning and Development, and Corporate, Community and Operation Services.

This composition raised the eyebrows of Councillor Thompson at last week's General Committee meeting, which approved the recommendations in principle.

?'[The report] outlines who sits on the committee, but I didn't see anybody from the public or the business community, somebody who is actually downtown and there every day, living the parking challenges,?' he said. 'Did we not give some thought to inviting someone from the BIA (Business Improvement Area), the downtown business core, to be part of the parking working group for some real-world experience?'

While staff admitted they don't presently have a member representing the surrounding business community, David Waters, Director of Planning for the Town, said it was a 'great idea' and they would be asked to participate.

'I am sure staff are more than qualified from a technical aspect, but sometimes it is good to have user experiences prior to the assessment process and I would like to see some of that show up on the working group,?' replied Councillor Thompson.

But, added CAO Doug Nadorozny, there are certain circumstances in which these stakeholders would not be able to participate.

'The intent of the group is mostly a staff working group because we do want to handle a wide range of subject matters, such as possible property acquisitions that may not be appropriate for the public to be aware of,?' said Mr. Nadorozny. 'Our intention was to bring in the people according to which aspect of the parking plan we were looking at.'

Replied Councillor Thompson: 'As long as we are capturing different perspectives.'

Community input wasn't the only sticking point at last week's meeting. Other lawmakers, including Councillors Rachel Gilliland and Wendy Gaertner, questioned whether the report before them contained complete information.

Councillor Gilliland, for instance, said it was important to wait until the building of Library Square was fully up-and-running before implementing many components of the parking plan, including the proposed Yonge and Church traffic signal and the all-way stop just east of that block. Councillor Gaertner agreed, noting that the data should include the traffic impacts of the complete Library Square vision.

‘We have a very different plan for the use of space and the addition of space in Library Square,’ said Councillor Gaertner, referring to the plan approved by Council in August.

In response to their concerns, Mr. Waters said the recommendations take the post-Library Square traffic forecast into account.

‘We understand traffic volumes will change from what they are today and both recommendations forward these two improvements to a budget process,’ he said. ‘We’re not proposing to do them right now’ our recommendation is that you wait until the Library Square development is up and running.’

Added Robin McDougall, Aurora's Director of Community Services: ‘These recommendations, although they were initiated in 2018, were also updated as the project progressed. The information [in front of Council] is relative to the latest inputs and the data you are seeing’ is [the Consultants’] final assessment.’

By Brock Weir Editor Local Journalism Initiative Reporter