

New condos could play a factor in northeast traffic calming

By Brock Weir

Incoming condo developments could be deciding factors in determining the future of traffic calming in Aurora's northeast quadrant.

Councillors are set to give further consideration this week to a recommendation coming out of last week's General Committee to seek further community input from residents over the remainder of traffic calming measures in the historic neighbourhood, including traffic diverters and one-way directions.

Following a lengthy discussion, Councillors opted to go back to staff for further analysis on how new condominium developments slated for Wellington Street East, beside the former Aurora Post Office Building and the Centro development at Yonge and Centre Street, which is currently under construction, will impact traffic in the community

Following extensive consultation within the historic neighbourhood and the wider community, Council opted last year to remove the chicanes, one of the more reviled traffic calming measures installed in the neighbourhood. Feedback from the surveys continually derided that particular measure which some felt not only impeded traffic flow, but also raised safety hazards.

They chose to retain the diverters and one-way streets and maintaining that status quo was the recommendation Councillors faced last week.

“Since [the chicanes were removed] on Mark Street and Walton Drive in November, staff have not received any further complaints or comments on traffic movement in the area,” said Ilmar Simanovskis, Aurora's Director of Infrastructure, in a report to Council. “There seems to be an appropriate balance of traffic control and commuter convenience and accessibility. Making further alterations to the remaining traffic controls may increase concerns from the local community while creating minimal benefit to the commuting public.”

Councillors, nevertheless, voted at committee to head back to the public to see if this is still indeed the case. Although ultimately supportive of the recommendation made by Councillor John Abel, others such as Councillors Evelyn Buck and Michael Thompson questioned the need to do it again after a successful survey last summer. But the impact of the two condos, which could both use Centre Street as main traffic arteries, was the missing piece of the puzzle.

“The buildings, as part of the approval process, will be required to [complete] a traffic study to provide what the impacts would be and the measures that would be required,” said Mr. Simanovskis. “I would suggest there was no significant impacts and there was no request to add any further traffic calming.”

Councillors, however, were less convinced.

“If anyone sits at Centre and Spruce where it deadends, the people disobey the law,” said Councillor Abel. “The civil disobedience of them running through the signs is well documented and very difficult for police. We have to look at this as a whole. There might be a spot here and there and I think residents are going to help us best. I don't think we have to wait until people occupy the buildings. You do traffic studies. I can just imagine on Centre Street if there are 70 cars coming out of Centro and another 30 coming out onto Centre, assuming they are not going out onto Yonge and Wellington, they're going to be on Centre Street.”

“Before we make any decision, I think the smart thing to do is look at how residents living in that building and who will be visiting that building will be utilizing that street,” added Councillor Paul Pirri, suggesting a further report come back in two years based on the impacts of the new buildings.

These new buildings will “dramatically change the look and feel” of the neighbourhood, agreed Councillor Michael Thompson and charting the way forward should be tackled in two steps. But he also argued no traffic concerns had been formally identified before

plans were approved.

?It is hard to predict at this point,? he said. ?I know when we had discussions around the table with the approval of the Centro plans, there were questions about they wouldn't have access to Yonge Street and they would turn around Catherine and that area, but there was no concern raised at that time with the traffic study that was presented to us then,? he said.