

Parking crackdown sparks talks of on-street parking permits

By Brock Weir

A crackdown on the enforcement of winter parking restrictions across Aurora could lead to the development of an on-street parking permit system.

The move stems out of last week's General Committee meeting where Councillors gave the tentative green light for strengthened enforcement of the Town's existing winter parking restrictions, particularly when it comes to spots surrounding neighbourhood parks.

While it will be some weeks before a report comes back to Council on the development and implementation of such a system, they are expected to give the formal green light to upping the enforcement at this week's Council meeting.

"I have had a number of emails from residents around Town Park specifically with respect to parking around Town Park," said Mayor Geoff Dawe, noting working with Techa van Leeuwen, Aurora's Director of Bylaw Services, to come up with a solution. "One of the things we have done is put the enforcement of the regulations out to March 1. While the parking restrictions have been in force for 30 or 40 years, we haven't enforced them so people are used to parking around Town Park.

"They think we are doing something new, but we're just enforcing what should have been done all along."

Part of the issue of parking around Town Park is its proximity to the GO Station. Parking spaces taken over by commuters rather than users of the park itself is a particularly challenging area for Ms. van Leeuwen's department, she said, as it is difficult to properly identify cars that should and should not be there.

"Overnight restrictions might prohibit those early GO Train commuters from using Town Park because they wouldn't be able to park and make their train," she said. "We would have to consider what other options are available, what types of tools we could use in patrolling the area, and trying to determine whether or not they are being used by commuters or by individuals who are, in fact, using the park. It is a difficult situation."

While the enforced parking restrictions were largely supported by Council, they questioned whether there would be a better way forward. Councillor Tom Mrakas, for instance, said he has heard concerns from residents who "find they don't have enough parking spaces", especially in areas of townhomes and semi-detached homes.

His amendment for a report looking into a parking permit system was supported by Councillor Sandra Humfries.

"I think it is a really warranted area to look into," she said. "I know it is probably difficult to manage, but if we can figure out how the City of Toronto does that, it would really help those neighbours because I do see a bigger problem there. Even when it is not winter, [parking] is very, very tight."

Councillor Wendy Gaertner, on the other hand, questioned how such a system would impact snow clearing. If permit parking is implemented, it could indeed impact clearing, noted Ilmar Simanovskis, Aurora's Director of Infrastructure, but that impact would be contingent on how many permits were issued, the concentration of cars, and other factors.

"The current practice of not having cars parked on the road allows us free access and that is the best situation we could have," he said.

Building on the suggestion of a permit system, Councillor Harold Kim went a step further saying an online permit system would be worth investigating too.

"Sometimes when residents have people over and it is wise for them not to be driving, it would be nice to have just-in-time parking

passes available online?to print out and put on your dashboard,? he said.

Less enthusiastic about overall parking enforcement was Councillor Gaertner who said she fielded a call from a resident who parked on a cul-de-sac at 3 a.m. and received a ticket. The street in question, she said, was a third stage snow clearing area, and this kind of enforcement was too much, she ventured.

?I think it is wrong and I think it is unfair to our residents, she said, to Ms. van Leeuwen. ?I think you do an amazing job?but maybe sometimes some leniency can be shown.?

Ms. van Leeuwen said parking can be a ?contentious? issue on both sides and hundreds of complaints are received every year about people parking illegally on streets.

?It is a difficult situation and [officers] are on duty for the purposes of patrolling the Town and to obtain compliance,? she said. ?If a person receives a ticket once, hopefully they won't continue to violate, which addresses a snow clearing issue.?