

Councillor Q&A Sessions Downtown Parking Master Plan

Session 1 – August 29, 2023 Session 2 – August 30, 2023

3 p.m. – 5 p.m.
Microsoft Teams

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Attendance:

Mayor and Council (session #)		Staff	Consultants
Councillor Caton (1)	Councillor Goller (2)	Terry Gayman	Ralph Bond
Councillor Downer (2)	Councillor Richardson (2)	Jamie Zettle	Sue Cumming
Mayor Guthrie (1&2)	Councillor Klassen (2)	Steve Anderson	Stuart Anderson
Councillor O'Rourke (1)	Councillor Yee Chew (2)	Stacey Laughlin Jasmin Orobono	

Topic: Parking / GO Transit

Q. Our transportation master plan looks at the model shift within the city boundaries, but there are people who will be shifting by driving downtown. What is the plan?

There will be people who are going to park downtown Guelph to take the GO train to Toronto or to Kitchener on evenings and weekends. What's the plan to absorb that surge?

A. Metrolinx's most recent presentation to the City noted they forecast only needing 70 parking spaces (8% of people will park) and they don't want to encourage more people to drive, identifying Guelph station as a transit-first hub. Over the years, Metrolinx has heard complaints about building massive parking garages and providing parking for free and the traffic congestion that it caused. Their approach to GO parking is to minimize parking and encourage people to use other modes. City staff will continue to engage with Metrolinx regarding parking related to two-way, all-day GO and advocate for commuter parking needs to be monitored and managed.

Q. There are rumors that Metrolinx is going to build a transit terminal halfway between Guelph and Kitchener. Is this true and will parking be available?

A. At this point is, Metrolinx has identified Breslau as a potential future station. Staff aren't aware of anything beyond that in terms of the size or scale of parking to be provided. There's no timeline when construction will begin.

Topic: Reduction in residential parking ratios / PIL program

Q. Just along the same accessibility lines, I was wondering with the PIL (payment-in-lieu) payments or residential parking ratio change, that doesn't negate their need to put in accessible parking, right? Because that's provincially mandated, correct?

A. That is correct.

Q. How do we solve the parking issue for a developer on Carden St and will we be able to accelerate that, or do they have to wait for the policy to come back? How long before that moves forward for them?

A. Staff are piloting a payment-in-lieu of parking program (PIL) to unlock our existing built form to add additional residential use but not to support large or extensively changed buildings. PIL will be applied on a case-by-case basis subject to the proposed development specifications.

Q. The proposed residential development parking rate of 0.85 spaces downtown wasn't proposed in the Official Plan Amendment 80 conversation? Does it apply for both apartments and mixed use and ARDU's (additional residential dwelling unit) downtown? Do they still require one parking spot? Why are we going to still require one parking spot for ARDU? If you put in a basement apartment or you a tiny home, you do have to provide one parking spot?

A. The utilization study occurred during the same time as the Official Plan Amendment was in review. The province is encouraging municipalities to reduce their rates wherever they can. The master plan included utilization studies in existing buildings to determine the demand that people are exhibiting, and staff think is a reasonable approach today to reduce the rate to match what is occurring on average. Some of the newer buildings like the ones that Arthur Street are exhibiting demand closer to one or 0.95 and some of the other buildings, the older buildings in downtown, are lower than 0.85. The City and Developers do not want to overbuild supply. Staff are structuring the zoning bylaw amendment to apply to downtown zones, so where residential units are permitted in downtown zones, that's where the zoning requirement would apply.

Q. And it's a parking minimum, right? There's no maximum, so if a developer sees the need, it's going to be a higher end. Tricar wants to provide 1.5. They can do that?

A. Yes, staff haven't proposed a maximum through the Downtown Parking Master Plan.

Q. Many developers say that downtown Kitchener area to build is much easier and much less onerous on parking. I'm just wondering if the report captures what the parking ratio or minimums are with the surrounding municipalities compared to us? It would be interesting to see what Downtown Cambridge or Galt are doing or Downtown Kitchener or Waterloo, Downtown Milton, or Mississauga.

A. While all cities are unique, with unique transit, light rail, employment, and economic environments, these are the rates in comparable cities.

Kitchener Downtown (Urban Growth Centre) – Zero spaces required for residents and visitors

Waterloo Downtown (Urban Growth Centre) – 0.60 to 0.65 (based on proximity to LRT) for residents and 0.10 for visitors

Cambridge Downtown (Partial Area) – zero parking for residents and visitors in core area and 1.0 space per unit for residents but no visitor parking in periphery

Mississauga recently reduced the rate for apartments in the UGC from 1.0 to 0.80 but has approved some further reduction to about 0.65 per unit, but the context is much different – much better transit, jobs, and large regional shopping centre in the centre.

Q. Downtown Ottawa has piles of small parking lots everywhere. There's a lot of parking for people who live in apartment buildings that only have 1 space or no spaces for their visitors. If we're reducing the parking ratio downtown, what are the comparators? How do we account for visitor parking and accessible spaces?

A. The 0.85 number was based on surveys we did of 10 apartment buildings downtown and given what we're seeing, we think some buildings are lower. There's still a requirement in the zoning bylaw for part of the visitor parking demand that will be there to be supplied on site. The rest of it would be accommodated in City owned facilities or people will park in private parking lots. Between on-street parking and the proportion of visitors parking that new apartment buildings are required to supply there will be enough. The last piece of the resident parking puzzle is why staff are piloting a PIL program so that if a developer still for reasons related to the site can't quite do the 0.85 then they could make a payment to the city for utilizing part of the city's parking infrastructure for apartment residents and save on building in the last few spaces at some cost on their own site. Staff will review the ratio in five years depending on what kind of buildings get constructed downtown, complete the surveys again, and make adjustments if necessary.

Q. So someone does the payment-in-lieu. Where does that money go?

A. The Planning Act requires that we set up a specific reserve fund. The report recommends the establishment of this reserve. The money will be allocated to this reserve and would likely be used for capital projects related to parking in the future.

Q. If we're collecting money from cars and personal vehicles, money collected related to parking, could we not allocate that money to active transportation, including the transit system? Could we take that money and put it into a reserve and then could the money that's being collected there, somehow be used contractually with a developer to offset rents within the building on a 20-year contract so that they become affordable housing units?

A. The staff report projects approximately \$600,000 annually coming in through the PIL program as an initial estimate. When you think about the parking operation, there's substantial costs in the future in terms of maintenance of the Parkades and future potential expansion with 700 more spaces. The City has other reserves like the transportation reserve where our red-light camera and Automated Speed Enforcement revenues will be going that will help the City improve in other areas like active transportation infrastructure.

Parking staff will work with finance and legal staff to explore the policy opportunities as it relates to the objectives for which a PIL reserve was best established.

Q. Is there any sense in doing an incentive program to encourage housing to be built downtown that has like a sunset clause on it for no parking requirements at all for the next two years? Specifically, to student housing. Has there been any thought about incentives at all with having no parking?

A. One of the items envisioned in developing the policy that goes with the PIL program is a subset of exemptions. If you were building certain types of construction, then the policy may allow for a reduction in the fees associated with a development met by certain criteria. So far, considerations are being analyzed for seniors housing, affordable housing, student housing.

Q. Can we use the payment-in-lieu proceeds to retire the debt faster which would free up operating funds which we could then use for whatever we wanted?

A. Staff intend to respond to this if required at Committee of the Whole.

Topic: Changes to permits, rates, and targeted programs

Q. Are we looking at a model where you see these Parkades like you see Fountain St empty or you'll see that it's empty but it's showing full in terms of the monthly permits, so other people would benefit from buying a monthly permit? Have we looked at a model that captures the new post COVID where people aren't going in five days a week so that we could bring those rates down a little bit, \$30 a day is steep, especially when someone's trying to do the right thing and take the GO train instead of driving into Toronto. Are we looking at a different model for those monthly passes or day rate parking?

A. One of the items the Master Plan is suggesting is to examine the existing rate and permit structure. The plan discusses a targeted approach to different user groups including volunteers, business owners, and medical offices. The Master Plan doesn't recommend a GO train permit solution yet, but staff will continue to monitor and consider this concept in collaboration with Metrolinx.

Q. The staff report refers to the development of a residential permit parking program. Can you just provide the top notes on that?

A. Feedback during public consultation indicates that residents in the periphery of downtown would like to have assurances that there is some access to their block face for parking. The notion is to develop a program that would offer a portion of the parking stalls on the block face to residents first, and then the remainder would be available for public consumption so an employee could purchase them at a much lower rate than anything that's in the actual downtown core. It's a way to help manage some of that user behavior.

Q. Two businesses that are at the base of River mill condos, there's one or two parking spots behind Butterfly Salon/Retour Bistro they're right on Wellington. They've been told or they've had customers who are ticketed if they park in the Neeve St Lot when it's totally empty. They have rented in a building that assumes our TMP is totally fulfilled, and people are walking and biking and taking transit, but the reality is their customers can't park to get to them. Is there a remedy in the Downtown Parking Master Plan for businesses like? Can those businesses buy or rent a set of spots (i.e. River Run lot) just for their clients?

A. Staff have had conversations with the condo board and businesses and need to develop an expanded on-street parking approach that finds space for shoppers, diners, and visitors, which solving some of the owner and employee parking needs with targeted permit programs.

Q: Have we considered any behavioural economics or "nudges" in the parking master plan? For example, make the first hour free in a parkade so that we nudge this behaviour and get people used to parking in them? When the behaviour has changed, you gradually reduce the subsidy. What would be the financial impact?

A. The study team has had initial conversations. This work will be completed when staff look at creating and revising the rates and permit offers. There are financial and technological implications to consider when making a recommendation.

Q: Can we have programs to support businesses with parking for their employees?

A. Yes, staff will discuss such a program when the work to create targeted permit programs, such as for volunteers, not-for-profits, cultural organization, and business organizations, is completed.

Q: There seems to be some confusion between the seasonal patio program and the parking master plan about the availability of parking. The patio program messaging would suggest that there is not enough parking while the master plan says there is sufficient. Can you clarify?

A. The patio program report does not suggest there is not enough parking in alignment with the parking master plan. The perception of insufficient parking was raised by businesses downtown who do not have a patio as part of their operation. Staff agree that there should be a fee for the businesses to use the parking spaces – particularly since they use the spaces to make money and Council wanted a revenue neutral program.

Topic: Expanding our assets through partnerships

Q. On page 6, are we also looking at private options to add more parking? For example, if Conestoga said, can we put a parkade on Neeve St? Could we let them do that?

A. With the Official Plan and the zoning bylaw, it is difficult to have standalone parking as a use, but if parking on a property is combined with another use and a development can oversupply it, that is allowed. The master plan also contemplates strategic use of our parking assets to expand multiple uses on the same site.

Q. If a developer comes in and they can't provide parking, can we work with them to put a structure on the Macdonell St Lot or another lot that we have?

A. The Master Plan recommends staff identify parking assets for redevelopment with multiple uses, perhaps using public-private partnerships. We need to add pockets of parking wherever we can.

Topic: Staging of the master plan

Q. Are the solutions for the next 5-10-15 years? Here's what we can do now, and these are the other things we're going to be looking at going forward?

A. The Master Plan is prescriptive about the very nearest term activities, those that staff can do within the next 18 months to two years and then outlines a work plan for five years and what to think about in 10 years. Staff will update and iterate the priorities in the master plan as we deliver 5-year updates to the plan.

Theme – Operational considerations

Q. Regarding electric vehicle (EV) charging. Are people going on a long trip and need to charge when they're downtown? Those EV Chargers are primarily for people who are external or driving in from work and will charge at home. Being cautious about this desire to provide EV charging

for everybody. It's not necessary and it's expensive. In some of the older buildings it will be hard to retrofit with EV chargers.

A. The report suggests the city manage it prudently and install where it makes sense and understand where there's usage.

Q. Do we need more 15-minute parking spaces.

A. Downtown needs more specialized type of spaces, particularly on the street. That level of detail isn't in this document, but these considerations will be part of the street designs as downtown is reconstructed. Those streetscaping spaces that aren't suitable for a traditional parking bay that might work for a smaller vehicle, motorcycle, bicycle pickup, etc.

Topic: Privatizing the parking operation

Q. Does the Service Rationalization Report have any recommendations for parking and did we look at the possibility of privatizing the operations and would that be good or bad? Is that a consideration?

A. Questions regarding the privatization of the parking operation are required to be held in closed council session.

Q. Is there any thought about future use of city? Ownership of all Parkades? Is there an in-camera portion to have as a discussion point regarding the assets?

A. Right now, the report recommends that the City continue operating the parking system with the enhancements outlined.

Topic: Technology and Innovation

Q. The Downtown Parking Master Plan referred to technology like the Rover app, where people can rent out excess parking spaces at their homes? People who have a spare space, can they just rent it out to somebody?

A. In the Master Plan and in the Staff Report there's a technology, digital-first approach to this kind of work. It doesn't explicitly call out the specific apps or specific wayfinding technologies, but that would be a focus for the next 5 years. It could help solve turnover, occupancy, and circling problems.

Topic: Budget/Financial Impact

Q. What is the cost to the taxpayer now versus previously. Is it a similar amount or is it increased?

A. Staff intend to be able to speak to this at Committee of the Whole if required.

Q. What is the number per household that we pay for property tax that goes to transit compared to the parking because I know some folks are going to say, oh, I don't use this?

A. Parking staff are looking into this with Finance and Transit staff and will report back to the Committee of the Whole if required.

Q. One of the only places we have paid on-street parking is outside Guelph General Hospital. Why do we do that?

A. The zone is paid parking to ensure there is turnover for visitors and families of patients who need to visit the hospital.

Q. What about paid parking at West End Rec Centre? What about the library? What about the New South end Rec center? What about Victoria Rd?

A. A city-wide parking study is a recommendation of the Transportation Master Plan. Staff are reviewing potential timing for that study, which will be identified through the upcoming Multi-year Budget process.