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Downtown Parking Mitigation Strategy Information Report

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In accordance with the Procedure By-law, any member of Council may make a request to the Town Clerk that this Report be placed on an upcoming Committee of the Whole agenda for discussion.

Executive Summary

This report provides information on upcoming changes to the downtown parking supply and demand starting in May 2024. With an exciting summer events schedule planned, from the return of popular downtown restaurant patios to the opening of the new Postmark Hotel, the Town is preparing for increased parking demand expected in the downtown area. At the same time, and to implement much greater long-term parking supply, construction will begin on an initial surface parking lot to be made available for the summer and fall months in the tennis court area. The surface parking lot then will become the site of a two-level parking structure with construction expected to start in late 2024 and extending until summer 2025.

To mitigate the disruption created by construction, while anticipating higher parking demands, a mitigation strategy has been developed to address the situation. Opportunities for additional parking areas are being explored, and programs will be implemented to ease the search for parking to create more opportunities for motorists to find parking nearby.

While construction and busy events may combine to make the parking situation somewhat different from past years, significantly more parking will be created when the new parking structure is fully constructed so that the downtown area can continue to thrive and grow.

Purpose

This report provides information on strategies to mitigate the disruptive impacts caused by construction and increased demands for parking in the downtown. The opening of the Postmark Hotel and other new venues, the annual introduction of patios and events, coupled with construction of new parking facilities will place pressure on the existing overall parking supply downtown, for which a strategy is needed.

Background

With the popularity of downtown Newmarket as a top attraction in York Region for restaurants, programs and special events, sufficient parking has historically been a concern for visitors and businesses.

Earlier this year at its February 12, 2024 meeting, Council adopted the recommendations of [report 2024-06 – Downtown Parking Update](#) to proceed with a modular parking structure to be constructed in the tennis court area of the Commons North (commonly known as P3) municipal parking lot. This structure will be a ground-plus-one level facility accommodating about 228 spaces based on preliminary designs and is capable of being increased with another level to accommodate a total of 338 spaces in future if the need arises. The Request for Proposals (RFP) procurement process is underway, and construction is expected to begin by late 2024. In the interim, and beginning on May 7, 2024, the tennis court facility will be decommissioned through a separate contract. Once that facility has been removed, a temporary gravel parking lot will be constructed providing approximately 119 new spaces for this summer and fall.

Current parking supply in the Commons North lot alone is about 305 spaces. Parking in Commons North, South, Riverwalk and Market Square combined totals about 495 spaces, and if one includes the additional lots at Fairy Lake, All Our Kids (AOK) Playpark and Gorman Pool the total downtown area parking supply is about 697 spaces. Most of these spaces are within a 5-minute walk of Main Street.

The Postmark Hotel opening slated for 2024 will generate additional visitors to the downtown area. With the opening, 12 parking spaces in the Commons North lot will be reserved for valet use by the Hotel. These were approved by Council at the time the Hotel received its final development approval. There likely will be some additional parking needed in the area beyond the Hotel's own on-site parking supply to accommodate employees, guests and visitors.

Patios are also about to be set up again for another season starting the first week of May. These have been popular during the past several years and will again add to the success of the downtown this year. Historically they reduce the parking supply in the downtown by about 12 spaces in total. They are primarily on or near Main Street and are in immediate proximity to the restaurants where the parking spaces have been taken.

The Town has been exploring the use of camera detection technology and analytics to assess occupancy levels specifically in the Commons North parking lot. To date, data and statistical summary information has helped to understand when peak parking demands occur and how much parking remains available. Parking demands regularly peak during weekday midday and afternoon periods with at least 90 percent occupancy in this location.

Discussion

The Town recognizes that it is important to plan for how the added construction impacts stemming from the new parking lot expansion will be mitigated.

In order to decommission the tennis court facility and prepare the area for the granular surface parking lot, a construction contract has been awarded and the contractor will require access and staging areas as part of the work zone. Initially, it was thought that a fenced area accessible only to construction vehicles to protect the safety of both visitors to the area and the constructor's team would have been required along the east side of the Commons North lot reserving a significant number of parking spaces. After further refinement, an alternate traffic management plan was developed with the contractor using signage and trained signallers to reduce the parking occupancy down to 5 spaces at the access point to the construction site. Contractor vehicle and equipment staging areas will be managed so that they occur within their work zone and do not occupy more spaces in the lot. Truck traffic in and out of the area will avoid Main Street and Queen Street, and direction will be given to route on to Regional Roads such as Bayview Avenue and Mulock Drive.

Construction is scheduled to begin on May 7, 2024, as this is the earliest date access to the tennis facility is available. Activities will be coordinated so that construction can be completed as quickly as possible. Although the contract extends to June 22, staff will be working with the contractor to accelerate the completion and are confident that the work can be completed before this date. This may require weekday evening work and weekend work (except for busy Saturday periods).

With any new parking lots created, staff will ensure that accessible parking spaces are provided within temporary and permanent parking areas.

As can be seen, the first 30 days of plans to significantly expand and increase the downtown parking supply will be trying due to the impacts of early construction coupled with new and seasonal parking levels. The following sections describe elements of a strategy to mitigate these impacts.

Additional Parking Opportunities:

Church Street between Park Avenue and Eagle Street currently has parking restrictions which prohibit on-street parking excluding Sundays. At the previous request of Council, staff investigated the potential to amend this restriction such that weekday and Saturday

on-street parking would be made available on the east side, as it currently exists for Sundays. This is the subject of a separate report to Council with a recommendation to amend the Parking Bylaw to allow for this on-street parking. The change would provide for 40 spaces to be made available within about 150-200 metres (3-minute walk) of Main Street, depending on location along Church Street. Should Council approve this additional on-street parking supply, these spaces could be signed and available by early to mid-May.

The nearby All Our Kids (AOK) Playpark to the immediate east across the Metrolinx rail corridor currently has a parking lot of 28 spaces. There is an equivalent sized sodded area immediately adjacent to it which could be converted temporarily into a granular parking lot with a corresponding additional 28-30 spaces. Town is currently working towards gaining an understanding of the relative costs and requirements for Lake Simcoe Regional Conservation Authority (LSRCA) approval to permit this temporary granular lot since it is within their permitted area. This new parking area would be about 200 metres (3-minute walk) from the Timothy Street/Doug Duncan Drive intersection and could offset some of the parking pressures expected during 2024 and 2025 from construction and from new parking demands. Should this opportunity prove to be permitted, timely and cost-effective, it is expected that this temporary parking area would eventually be returned to sod with completion of the parking structure.

Programming and Incentives:

During major construction in 2023, a pilot program was tested to incent employees and owners of downtown businesses to park at periphery locations to make more of the closest parking in the downtown core available to visitors and customers of the businesses. This Park and Walk program was successful in shifting 100 subscribers to these lots during their scheduled working hours. Since not all subscribers worked similar hours, the effective parking shift during peak hours was estimated at about 15-20 employees at any given time. The Park and Walk program has been initiated again this year to cover the immediate challenge presenting itself in May/June. The program is similar in size and scope to last year with the flexibility to increase if demand presents itself and budget continues to be available.

Programming at the Community Centre and Lions Hall has also been purposely curtailed during the 2024 booking season, in particular allowing only legacy events and organizations who have longstanding bookings. This is aimed at reducing the daytime and weekend peak parking demands when it is known that parking supplies are fully used in the Commons area lots. While it is difficult to quantify the effectiveness of this mitigation, it is expected that there may be about 20-40 fewer vehicles found on a regular basis as a result of the fewer bookings.

Use of the tennis courts themselves generated a parking demand from members of the tennis community who regularly attended the facility in the past and parked in the Commons North lot. With decommissioning the courts to construct the new expanded parking facilities, the previous tennis parking demands would no longer be present. This

inherent parking reduction cannot be claimed as a programmed mitigation, but it nonetheless can be identified as a reduced demand. Again, while this may be difficult to quantify, it is reasonable to account for between 20 and 30 fewer parked vehicles found during peak daytime and weekend periods.

Communications:

Likely the most direct way to communicate on-the-ground alternate parking locations to motorists is with signage in the immediate area of the downtown and the Commons lots in particular. The Town will implement signage that directs motorists to close by alternate locations such as the existing AOK Playpark lot and the Fairly Lake lots south of Water Street. Signs will use simple graphics where possible to quickly convey “Parking” with an arrow for wayfinding. The Fairy Lake lots are as close as 200 metres (3-minute walk) to Water Street, with the furthest being 400 and 500 metres (6 to 7 minute walk) from Water Street, offering a total of 136 spaces.

Initial and on-going communications with the Newmarket Downtown Business Improvement Area (BIA) will be undertaken to promote effective engagement and awareness of impacts and mitigations. This is particularly important for the success of some of the initiatives (e.g., Park and Walk program) and to help support the businesses during construction until the much-anticipated expanded parking facilities are ready. The Town recognizes that adequate and convenient parking is vital to the success of the downtown, including the businesses that create the attraction, and when changes to parking supply or configuration happen, businesses deserve to know so that they can plan their offerings accordingly.

Coordination and Further Mitigation Planning:

Town staff will continue to meet as a cross-corporate team to monitor and adjust initiatives to ease parking pressures as much as practical in response to emerging needs or changes as they arise. As indicated earlier, the initial 30-day period will be of particular interest to see how the parking situation unfolds in May/June. The team will also be diligent to work with the contractor to ensure that the decommissioning of the tennis courts and the construction of the surface granular parking lot is completed as quickly as possible. It is anticipated that after the granular surface parking lot is ready in early-to-mid-June (weather permitting), the parking pressures will be significantly relieved with the addition of about 119 parking spaces over the current supply.

Staff are in discussions with Metrolinx to plan for intersection and rail crossing improvements at the Timothy Street and Water Street track crossings. Early indications are that this work will involve some degree of lane closures on each of these streets between Doug Duncan Drive and the rail tracks. The work schedule would be provided by Metrolinx as they intend for the work to be completed in 2024. Staff will make best efforts to coordinate the work so as not to coincide with other construction occurring in the area related to the Commons parking lot improvements; however, timing and duration are yet to be determined.

Expectations for Coming Years:

With planned construction of the modular parking structure occurring during 2025, a similar construction traffic management plan and access route along the east side of the Commons North parking lot can be expected. This work will involve excavation and haulage of materials to and from the site on a regular basis, delivery of large precast concrete sections and staging for assembly of the structure. The detailed traffic management plan will be developed with the successful contractor when the schedule of activities is known. Similar parking mitigation strategies that prove successful in 2024 could be undertaken again in 2025 to lessen the construction impact as deemed necessary.

Wayfinding will certainly continue to play a role in making it easier for visitors to find available parking in the years to come. It is envisioned that a combination of signage and app-based programs will connect with real-time data so that effective directions can be communicated to motorists and ease pressures of finding parking particularly during busy peak periods.

Parking enforcement will also need to be considered where periods of high demand and limited supply mean that parking spaces will need to be used most effectively. With some parking locations meant for more frequent turn over (30-minute, 2-hour or 3-hour), they should be subject to more frequent enforcement to ensure a more regular and reliable supply for visitors during peak times.

Conclusion

Current parking supply in the Commons North lot is about 305 spaces. Parking in Commons North, South, Riverwalk and Market Square totals about 495 spaces, and including the additional lots at Fairy Lake, AOK Park and Gorman Pool the current total downtown area parking supply is about 697 spaces.

Adequate parking to serve the existing and future needs, in particular the core area on and adjacent to Main Street and at Community Centre/Riverwalk Commons, continues to be a concern. Accordingly, Council has approved the construction of additional parking in the tennis court area beginning in 2024 as an expansion of the Commons North municipal parking lot. This would increase parking by about 228 spaces through a ground-plus-one level parking structure, with the ability to increase to a total of 338 spaces with another modular level in future. Immediately, after the tennis court facility is vacated, and before the structure is commenced, the Town will create an interim surface granular parking lot in this same area that will increase parking by 119 spaces to address the immediate parking needs in the summer and fall of 2024.

The challenge with implementing new parking will be disruption experienced during construction. Construction access coupled with approved commitments for other downtown needs is expected to result in the following impacts in the Commons North parking area for a total of about 29 parking spaces occupied:

- 5 parking spaces removed during May/June construction of the interim lot
- 12 reserved parking spaces for Postmark Hotel valet services
- 12 parking spaces occupied by patio installations starting early-May

Once annual events begin in the downtown core and the Postmark Hotel and other new venues open, there likely will be additional parking use in the area to accommodate employees, guests and visitors.

As a planned strategy to mitigate this impact, this report identified a number of initiatives have been investigated and opportunities explored to increase both temporary and permanent parking by up to 125-160 spaces until the parking structure is complete. They are as follows:

- 40 new on-street parking spaces created on Church Street
- 15-20 spaces freed up by Park and Walk incentive program for BIA employees
- 20-40 spaces freed up by programming changes in peak times
- 20-30 spaces freed up by relocation of tennis court activities
- 30 potential parking spaces being explored at AOK Playpark as a temporary lot

Additionally, the Town is committed to introducing further measures to ease parking pressures during this period, including:

- Wayfinding signs to simplify the search for nearby alternate parking;
- Stronger By-law Enforcement during peak periods (e.g., 11:00a.m. -3:00p.m. Monday to Friday), and when required to promote turn over of spaces;
- Cross-corporate staff team to monitor the impacts and make adjustments;
- Early and regular communication with BIA, event organizers and the public to describe parking changes;
- Looking ahead to mitigate upcoming as yet unknown changes in coming months.

Other initiatives that may be explored depending on how effective and timely they might be, include:

- Extending the planned Farmer's Market shuttle beyond Saturday hours for peaks;
- Exploring short-term commitments for parking at peak times.

In summary, the Town recognizes that despite best efforts to mitigate impacts that are expected from construction and new development and seasonal parking pressures, the May/June 2024 period may still provide a degree of challenge to manage well. Visitors to the downtown can expect some change to familiar parking areas in the Commons North parking lot, and with collaboration between the Town, BIA and event organizers, implementation of the strategic steps described in this report to ease these pressures should greatly assist.

Business Plan and Strategic Plan Linkages

The measures described in this report are intended to further the Council Priorities of creating Extraordinary Places and Spaces, Community and Economic Vibrancy and a Customer-first Way of Life enhanced by technology.

Consultation

The initiatives contained in this report were developed in consultation with the CAO's Office, Engineering Services, Parks & Facilities Services, Public Works Services, Recreation & Culture Services, Economic Development, Legal & Procurement Services, Legislative Services and Corporate Communications.

Human Resource Considerations

No additional staff resources are required at this time to implement the interim measures described.

Budget Impact

Existing operating and capital budgets will be used to implement the interim measures described. Future/on-going costs would be presented through the Town's budget approval process.

Attachments

None

Approval

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Contact

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