

BRAMPTON GUARDIAN



Parking hike could kill core

By PAM DOUGLAS
February 16, 2010

One after another, downtown business owners stood up at a public meeting Thursday night and told city staff a proposed hike in parking fees will kill the core.

"If we do this now, charge exorbitant rates, it's going to drive businesses out," said Andrew MacKenzie of the Investors Group. "This is one of those tipping point issues that could put us back years and years."

The concern expressed by approximately 35 at the meeting revolved around a proposal to eliminate the one hour free parking at city lots, and a phased-in increase to the monthly and annual parking rates paid by employees or their employers.

After a consultant's study of parking in the downtown, the city is considering several recommendations, including an immediate increase of employee permit rates to \$440 a year from \$280, plus an additional \$10 per month (\$110 per year) increase each year for the next six to eight years.

Richard Evans of CCV Insurance on Queen Street West said he has 50 employees in the downtown and his company pays more than \$12,000 for 44 parking passes. In three years, the city's proposed increase would see that amount go up 250 per cent, he said.

"That's a strong motivation not to be here," he told staff.

Others said the changes would impact customers.

"Free parking is critical to our survival," Brian Cyr, of the Academy of Martial Arts on Main Street North, told city staff. He said the school opened in the downtown when the city offered three free hours of parking. That was cut back to one hour, and if that one hour is taken away, he'll have to consider closing his downtown school and expanding the north Brampton branch he opened to increase business.

"Most students see the downtown (school) as a place to go only if they have to, not because they want to," he said.

"I am very concerned that we will have increased vacancy," said Rod Hendren, a real estate appraiser who has worked in the core since 1977. He said the office vacancy rate soared in the 1990s and "it was because of parking costs."

Brampton Downtown Development Corporation President Karen Campbell summed up the concerns.

"The cost and availability of parking is fundamental to the economic competitiveness of downtown businesses," she said.

She told staff her organization is supportive of several of the recommendations made by a consultant in an in-depth study of parking in the downtown.

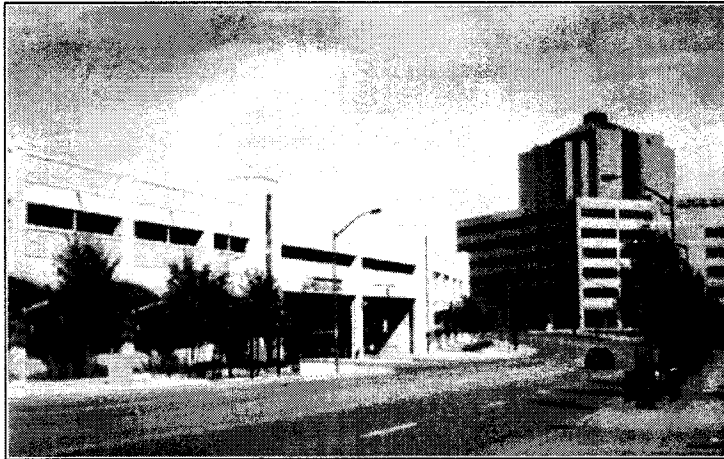
"However, there's a number of recommendations that cause us great concern," she said.

Those are the cost increases for monthly and yearly parking permits, the elimination of the one hour free parking offered at municipal garages, and the continued support of a tow away zone on the north side of Queen Street between 4 and 6 p.m.

"We want it (the tow away zone) reviewed, but the consultant has said no."

Campbell and others said customers inadvertently getting caught after 4 p.m. in that area often refuse to return after having their vehicles towed.

She presented 18 written submissions to city staff from business owners who could not be at the public information meeting.



Downtown parking: The city's Downtown Parking Study was the subject of a public information meeting that brought downtown business owners out to voice their opinions. Results of the meeting will be included in a staff report to Committee of Council April 7 for consideration.

Those in attendance were told the Downtown Parking Study showed Brampton's monthly parking rates are "among the lowest" in what the study called "comparable downtown municipal parking facilities." It also said that, as long as parking in the downtown is cheaper than a \$102 monthly bus pass, there will be no incentive for anyone to use public transit.

The one hour free would be replaced by a token system allowing businesses to buy tokens from the city at a 20 per cent discount, the study has recommended. The city also plans to automate their parking lots over time to save operating costs.

Other recommendations include regular increases in monthly parking rates to at least \$60 for the garages and \$30 for the surface lots , and adding 36 paid on-street parking spots on Market and Thomas Streets near the GO Station between 7 a.m. and 6 p.m. weekdays at a rate of .50 cents per half hour or a \$4 flat rate.

The city has identified several areas that need addressing— a lack of convenient, short-term parking on-street and off-street; loss of revenue from the free one hour of parking; the Market Square garage is overflowing, especially on weekdays when there are events at The Rose Theatre; the lower levels of the city hall garage are under-used; an increase on GO service is expected to impact parking availability.

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