

Corporate Report

Report from Transportation & Environmental Services, Operations

Date of Report: May 14, 2013

Date of Meeting: May 27, 2013

Report Number: TES-122-2013

File: 77.34.99

Subject: Introduction of Paid Parking on First Street Louth

Recommendation

That paid on-street parking be implemented on First Street Louth, between Fourth Avenue and the CNR mainline in a manner as described in Report TES-122-2013, and

That the need for on-street parking be re-evaluated either at the end of three years in conjunction with the NHS parking review or when the balance of First Street Louth is improved, and

That the City Solicitor be directed to prepare the necessary by-law. FORTHWITH.

Summary

The Niagara Health System (NHS) has experienced challenges related to on-site parking since the opening of the facility in March of this year. The provision of paid on-street parking on First Street Louth, between Fourth Avenue and the CNR mainline on a temporary basis, will provide some relief to the current parking concerns associated with the NHS site. The provision of paid on-street parking at this location also has the potential to generate additional revenue for the parking system (estimated between \$80,000 and \$200,000 annually).

In order to accommodate this paid on-street parking, the existing bike lanes will have to be removed. While staff recognizes that the elimination of bike lanes in favour of parking contradicts strategic planning objectives of the City, the implementation of paid parking at this location on a temporary basis does respond well to the immediate challenges of parking demand and revenue shortfalls. As such, staff is recommending that paid parking be implemented at this location for a period of three years and that the need for on-street parking be re-evaluated either at the end of this term or when the balance of First Street Louth is improved.

Background

With the opening of the new hospital in west St. Catharines on March 24, 2013, the amount of parking being provided for both the public and staff was identified as a

concern early-on. While these concerns have stabilized to some degree over the first two months of operation, there continues to be periods, primarily during weekdays, where parking availability is minimal. Although the Niagara Health System (NHS) has taken reasonable steps to address these parking concerns in the short term and is in the process of developing a long term parking management strategy, an immediate need for more parking exists from time to time. Allowing on-street paid parking along First Street Louth has been identified as a possible short term complement to the NHS plans.

The closing of the General Hospital on Queenston Street and the Hotel Dieu on Ontario Street will have a significant impact on parking meter related revenues from this point forward. The magnitude of this impact is estimated at \$170,000 annually and, when combined with other revenue losses associated with the closure of the Lower Level Parking Lot, the sale of the Raymond Street Parking Lot, the temporary closure of the Race Street Parking Lot for the construction of the Performing Arts Centre, and the potential reduction in parking fines, revenues from parking are expected to be \$360,000 to \$460,000 lower than in 2012. As outlined in the 2013 Parking Budget, the parking system is projected to operate with a \$630,000 deficit this year. Although there are sufficient funds in the Parking Reserve to cover this loss, the parking system is currently underfunded and needs new sources of revenue. The Ad-Hoc Downtown Parking Committee is attempting to address these concerns.

While adding paid on-street parking along First Street Louth will help ease the parking concerns associated with the hospital and will add needed revenue to the parking system, it will require the removal of bike lanes from Fourth Avenue to the Canadian National Railway (CNR) mainline (approximately 400 metres). The following report will discuss the pros, cons and impacts of this proposal.

Report

Portions of First Street Louth between Fourth Avenue and the CNR mainline were either reconstructed or altered in 2011 in anticipation of the hospital opening. In general, the road was widened to accommodate two basic travel lanes in either direction as well as various turning lanes at the signalized intersections of Fourth Avenue and Burbank Drive. Bike lanes were also provided on either side of the First Street Louth while a sidewalk was provided on the west side within the noted limits. Parking is currently not permitted on either side of the road.

Given its current width and configuration, it was quickly determined that parking, if permitted, could only be accommodated on one side of First Street Louth. It was also determined that providing a combination of parking, bike lanes and/or shared-use lanes was not possible.

With this in mind, two on-street parking options for First Street Louth were developed and reviewed (one for either side of the road). While both scenarios resulted in the same number of potential parking spaces (38), the option with the parking on the west side of the road (hospital side) provided better lane continuity

and direct access to the hospital lands (no road crossing). The existing sidewalk is also located on the west side of the road which promotes safer pedestrian travel leading to the hospital lands. Appendix 1 illustrates the existing and proposed road layouts.

In order to accommodate parking on either side of the road, the existing road markings along First Street Louth would have to be removed and the road repainted to provide the appropriate guidance to motorists. Parking meters and/or pay-and-display machines would also need to be installed. As the boulevard between the sidewalk and road is grassed, consideration should be given to providing concrete paths from groupings of parking spaces (usually two adjoining spaces) to the sidewalk. This not only benefits users by providing a clear, hard surface to walk on but also reduces the potential of slip, trip and fall incidents on the boulevard (risk management).

The addition of parking to First Street Louth and the removal of bike lanes will change the operating characteristics of the road from a suburban/commuter arterial to one that resembles a more traditional urban arterial (i.e. downtown core). While removing the bike lanes will place cyclists closer to traffic, adding parking to the road may help control and lower operating speeds. In order to provide supplemental guidance for cyclists, sharrows should be placed on the road, especially adjacent to the parking lane.

From an urban planning perspective, the Planning and Development Services Department offers the following comments.

The policies of the newly approved Garden City Plan focus on alternative forms of transportation and walkable communities. Replacing the First Street Louth bike lanes with on-street paid parking is not consistent with those policies.

The NHS is currently seeking planning approvals to construct a temporary parking lot with approximately 275 parking spaces on the west side of the drainage channel which borders the hospital on the west side. The parking lot is permitted as a temporary use only for a period of three years. Prior to the three years lapsing, NHS intends to reevaluate the parking demands at the hospital and determine whether the temporary parking lot should be made permanent or repurposed for an alternative use. A traffic demand assessment is anticipated to be part of NHS's parking review in three years' time. If paid parking is to be established on First Street Louth in place of the bike lanes to address the current parking shortage, it should be established as an interim measure only for a three year period, until such time as NHS completes an overall parking review. In three years' time, the bike lanes should be considered for reinstatement.

Financial Implications

The costs to implement paid parking on the west side of First Street Louth are estimated at between \$20,000 and \$50,000. This variation is largely dependent on the type of equipment that is used to control the parking. For example, if "existing

stock” single space parking meters are used, the cost to install these parking meters is estimated at \$8,000 (38 used parking meters). In contrast, the cost of installing new pay-and-display equipment is estimated at \$30,000 (two machines) with annual operating costs of approximately \$2,500 per year (paper, communication fees, credit card processing etc.). Although using the existing stock of parking meters is the cheaper solution, they do not allow credit cards as a payment option, which is often viewed as desirable. If new single space parking meters are desired, the cost to purchase and install these meters is estimated at \$30,000.

Other costs include removing the existing pavement markings on First Street Louth (\$8,500), applying new pavement markings (\$2,500) and providing concrete walking paths for every group of two parking spaces linking the curb to the sidewalk (\$10,000 – optional). None of these expenses have been budgeted.

From a revenue perspective, it is estimated that this parking could generate between \$80,000 and \$200,000 per year depending upon utilization and operating hours. Given the operating characteristics of the hospital, charging for parking seven (7) days per week and between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 8:00 p.m. has merit. At all other times (i.e. overnight), parking should be prohibited. From a rate perspective, charging \$1.50 per hour with no time limit is reasonable given that the hospital is currently charging \$2.00 per half hour. The \$1.50 per hour rate is also consistent with other parking rates charged in the Downtown and Port Dalhousie. With the loss of revenue associated with the closing of the General Hospital and Hotel Dieu sites (estimated at \$170,000), any new revenue is welcome by the parking system and will help offset current and future losses.

With this in mind, it is important to note that, unlike other paid on-street parking areas in the City, any parking along First Street Louth will not be considered convenient or “premium” by the public given its distance from the main entrance to the hospital. As such, it’s difficult to estimate or predict usage when the public’s attitude towards such parking is unknown. This combined with the potential influx of “free” or unregulated parking associated with new developments in close proximity may affect the long term viability of these parking spaces. In order to be competitive, rates will need to be reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that the parking remains attractive and economically sustainable.

Conclusion

Report TES-122-2013 provides an objective analysis of both the pros and cons associated with the temporary implementation of paid on-street parking at this location. Staff recognizes that the elimination of bike lanes in favour of parking contradicts strategic planning objectives of the City. Notwithstanding this philosophical challenge, the implementation of paid parking at this location on a temporary basis does respond well to the immediate challenges of parking demand and revenue shortfalls. One must also keep in mind that this report only contemplates a 400 metre segment of First Street Louth. The balance of this road has yet to be improved / urbanized. One would expect that the presence of bike lanes will be continuously evaluated as further development occurs. Therefore, it is

the recommendation of TES that paid parking be implemented at this location for a period of three years and that the need for on-street parking be re-evaluated either at the end of three years in conjunction with the NHS parking review or when the balance of First Street Louth is improved.

It is further recommended that the paid on-street parking be implemented subject to the following criteria:

- Installation of two pay and display machines with credit card capabilities,
- Paid parking 7 days per week, 8:00 am to 8:00 pm,
- Overnight parking prohibited,
- Parking Rate - \$1.50 / hour,
- Implementation of “Sharrows” to guide cyclists,
- Total estimated cost of implementation - \$51,000, and
- Funding source –Parking Reserve

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APPENDIX 1

FIRST STREET LOUTH PARKING PROPOSAL

