

March 1, 2021

Mayor Taylor and Councillors

Zoning bylaw 2019-06 for the Urban Centre Secondary Plan (UCSP) was approved by council less than 2 years ago. One part of this plan was to encourage and clarify commercial and residential development along the Yonge-Davis corridor. It was generally agreed by all levels of government that continued urban sprawl was not sustainable and future growth could be maintained through infill development. A new concept suggests that not every resident requires a vehicle to get around and that active transportation should be encouraged. One “carrot” aimed at developers in the new zoning by-law was reducing the number of costly vehicle parking spaces required in new projects and increasing the number of parking spaces for bicycles.

Currently before council is an application by Briarwood for a condo development at 693 Davis which is inside the UCSP and in Ward 3. As per the new zoning by-law, the developer is promising to provide parking for 212 bicycles. The assumption being that some buyers will not own a car. Currently there are no dedicated bike lanes anywhere near this project and it doesn’t appear we will be seeing one anytime soon. In marketing these units, Briarwood is going to be selling an active transportation lifestyle. Will the Town of Newmarket be there to support the developers marketing efforts with safe biking infrastructure? Will purchasers find out too late that the developer is promoting a healthy lifestyle after the town dropped the ball?

After listening to council deliberations, the word “pause” was frequently used when deciding whether Newmarket should continue moving forward with the Active Transportation Implementation Plan. Many councillors suggested perhaps we could save money by stopping inexpensive painting of bike lanes on town roads and instead study the feasibility of partnering with the region to build off street paths on regional roads and hydro corridors. While I agree that off street paths are preferable, the fabulous new Yonge St bike lanes shows that in reality “off street” is a misnomer and certainly costs significantly more to construct.

There has been no study of the effectiveness of bike lanes in Newmarket. There is however, a large body of evidence in other jurisdictions attesting to their positive results. After only 2 years into the ATIP, this is not the time to stop the rollout.

Paul Jolie