

May 17, 2016

**DEVELOPMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE SERVICES INFORMATION REPORT
ENGINEERING SERVICES 2016-25**

TO: Committee of the Whole
SUBJECT: Old Fire Hall and Other Downtown Parking Opportunities
ORIGIN: Director, Engineering Services

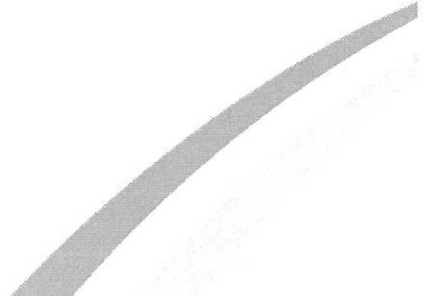
RECOMMENDATIONS

THAT Development and Infrastructure Services Report – ES 2016-25 dated May 15, 2016 regarding “Old Fire Hall and Other Downtown Parking Opportunities” be received and the following recommendations be adopted:

- 1. THAT the Old Fire Hall not be demolished to produce nine (9) parking spaces at this time;**
- 2. AND THAT Council approve the construction of 33 additional new parking spaces at the Fairy Lake Parking Lot;**
- 3. AND THAT staff prepare a report outlining the heritage, planning and economic aspects of the Old Fire Hall within the next 120 days.**

BACKGROUND

At its meeting of September 28, 2015, the Committee of the Whole passed a motion that staff report back on the potential of demolishing the Old Fire Hall at 140 Main Street South with the intent to repurpose it as a parking lot and that the report include any other options for parking enhancements in the downtown core.



COMMENTS

Staff in Engineering Services reviewed existing documentation regarding the current condition of the Old Fire Hall and also consulted with Economic Development staff, as well as Planning and Building Services staff to determine other uses that were being considered for the building. This matter was also discussed at the Community Centre Lands Parking Sub-Committee, whose mandate includes proposing and implementing near, medium and long-term parking solutions for the downtown core.

Engineering Services then worked with Public Works Services to produce designs based on various configurations that would yield the maximum number of parking spaces possible if the Old Fire Hall was to be demolished to provide parking. Preliminary costing was done to determine the cost per parking spot and to compare this with average costs per to help Council decide on whether this option would be desirable. Other parking options for the downtown area are also being presented in this report.

After producing a draft design in 2014, it was determined that a maximum of 9 parking spaces could be created if the Old Fire Hall is demolished (see Figure 1). Although the average cost to create new parking spaces in a surface parking lot is anywhere from about \$4,000 to \$6,000 per space, the cost to construct the 9 spaces at the Old Fire Hall would be about \$12,000 per space in 2014 dollars, for a total that could well exceed \$110,000 in current prices. This would include the cost of demolition and disposal of materials.

Input from Planning and from Economic Development indicates that there exists a concern that the visual impact created by a vacant lot or parking lot, as opposed to one containing a building, could be negative for the downtown core. This is especially concerning because the property is located at a very prominent and visible corner as one enters the core area.

There may also be some heritage value to the building that would preclude certain end uses. The heritage value and designation of the building would have to be explored further, but Planning and Economic Development also advise that there has been interest shown in the community to locate a business in the Old Fire Hall building. It should be noted that considerable repairs and upgrading to an acceptable standard would be required prior to any occupation of the building.

Despite the above, there are economic opportunities to be explored prior to deciding the fate of the Old Fire Hall building. Options could vary from renting or leasing the building, repairing and upgrading for future sale, or putting on the market for sale "as is" and letting an interested business owner conduct the repairs to fit their needs. The economic value of renting or selling the building far outweighs the parking considerations, especially when staff could focus on attracting a very complementary use that would benefit the entire downtown. The full heritage, economic and planning aspects related to the Old Fire Hall are beyond the scope of this parking report and will be dealt with under separate cover, along with the heritage value of the building, in either an information report to Council or a report to the Committee of the Whole.

Over the past years, the Town's parking consultant (BA Group) conducted field studies and provided several reports indicating that, although there is sufficient parking in the downtown core, there exists a perception that there is a shortage of parking, especially at the southernmost end of Main Street South (in the Water Street area). The studies have shown that there exists an imbalance between parking availability at the north area of Main Street South, versus the south end. Parking towards the north area of the historic downtown core (near the Old Fire Hall and northward) is sufficient, according to the Town's consultant. Based on this analysis, it is debatable whether adding a few additional parking spots at the north end of downtown Newmarket would help alleviate the perceived lack of parking at the south end. However, developing new parking spaces at the south end in the Water Street area might be beneficial to increase parking opportunities for patrons of businesses.

At one time, as a result of an enquiry from the business community, staff explored adding new parking spaces on some property that the Town owns at the rear of 500 Water Street, which is known as the Cachet Restaurant. A report to Council dated October 8, 2009, outlined the findings. It was found that the property is regulated by the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority (LSRCA), and that, due to the flood depths and velocities expected in that part of the floodplain, additional parking behind the Cachet building would not be supported by the LSRCA.

In addition to the LSRCA's position, staff also recommended not to proceed with these parking spaces due to other considerations. For example, additional parking at the rear of the restaurant would reduce the amount of green space in an area where the Town was (and still is) focusing on providing parkland and open spaces. Also, a parking lot in this area would have an impact on the image of Fairy Lake since it would reduce the naturalized area on the west side of the lake and it would be visible from the walking trail that exists on the west side of the lake. In addition to this, it was determined that the property was formerly the site of a hydro station and there are footings that are buried and concealed structures under the existing berms. There is also evidence of a retaining wall that served as a wall along Fairy Lake across this property that may be of a historical significance since it was also at one time the site of a mill. For all of these reasons, Council was in favour of not pursuing parking at the rear of the Cachet building.

Due to all of the above, Council may wish to defer any decision about demolishing the Old Fire Hall building for the time being, as staff prepares a report on the heritage value and on other potential uses for the Old Fire Hall. In the meantime, Council may wish to consider alternative proposals to increase downtown parking in the near and medium time frame at the south end of Water Street (where it appears to be most important), as presented below.

2. ADDITIONAL DOWNTOWN PARKING OPPORTUNITIES

The Community Centre Lands Task Force has established a "Parking Sub-Committee", whose mandate comprises the following:

- i. Propose and implement near, medium and long-term parking solutions for the downtown core;
- ii. Evaluate potential for other parking options (e.g.: OFH and south Commons area);
- iii. Review Wayfinding options, make recommendations to the CCL Task Force and prepare a report to Council for decision;
- iv. Retain a consultant to look at a tiered system of parking (e.g.: Clock Tower, free standing, temporary structures, etc.);
- v. Connect with stakeholders regarding near, medium and long-term plan (e.g.: BIA, others);
- vi. Report back to the CCL Task Force regularly.

The sub-committee has met several times to date and has begun to discuss near, medium and long-term solutions. Details on some of the parking solutions are given below. As a next step, a consultation with stakeholders will be undertaken to discuss these options and also to solicit further creative solutions from the community through a PIC.

2.1 Near-Term Solutions:

There is an opportunity to increase the number of parking spaces in the south end of the downtown core, where it is most important, later this year. The Fairy Lake parking lot, which is on lands that belong to the LSRCA, currently contains 9 parking spaces that are almost always fully utilized during busy days. This lot could be increased relatively easily by 33 additional new spaces, for a total of 42 spaces (see Figure 2).

In anticipation of Council's possible interest in this option, staff held preliminary discussions with the LSRCA and other agencies to see if there would be any objection to the proposal to increase the number of parking spaces. We are pleased to advise that we have been invited to proceed with a permit application and designs for the larger parking lot. However, the design would have to include Low Impact Development elements, especially in light of the lot's proximity to the water course. Despite having to include additional elements, the cost per parking space would still be much less than the cost of the 9 spaces that could be created at the Old Fire Hall.

If Council is in favour of this option, the spaces could be constructed later this year (mid-September to avoid causing disruption to downtown summer activities). This would be subject to a successful PIC and to receiving all of the required permits.

The total estimated cost of creating the 33 new spaces in the Fairy Lake parking lot would be about \$150,000 (about \$4,600 per space).

Another near-term solution that is being explored is to contact local institutions (e.g. churches or others) to see if it would be possible to access a portion of their private parking lot in exchange for some consideration. The extra parking spaces could be reserved either for employees who work on Main Street South, or for patrons visiting Main Street. If an agreement can be struck with some of the institutions, staff or local businesses could explore incentives that could be given to those who use the shared parking spaces.

2.2 Medium-Term Solutions:

Staff is studying medium-term options, including an innovative solution that involves a temporary parking structure. Temporary structures are low-cost alternatives to multi-tiered permanent parking structures. They have been used in the past to fill needs for high volume parking that is required for special events such as the Olympic Games, and they remain in use for several years after the event, or can be dismantled and sold. They are quick to construct and can be designed to be flexible so that they can accommodate changing parking needs in the future.

Another solution that is being proposed by the Town's Transportation Services division is to find a way to incentivize all employees in the downtown core to park their vehicles in the P3 Parking Lot located to the east of Main Street near the Community Centre and tennis courts, instead of parking in prime customer parking spots on Main Street.

Transportation Services has also discussed the possibility of implementing a shuttle service that goes up and down Main Street and/or Prospect Street, to give people a lift from the parking lots to various drop-offs along Main Street. This would be similar to the shuttle services that were implemented some years ago by Southlake Hospital to shuttle their workers from the parking lots at Tenatronics and from George Richardson Park.

The above would have to be implemented in partnership with other stakeholders, including the businesses on Main Street. Discussions with stakeholder groups to get their input and suggestions would be the next step.

2.3 Long-Term Solutions:

The need for a permanent parking structure in Downtown Newmarket is something that has been debated over the years. Although the Town's previous parking consultant concluded in several reports that there is sufficient parking that exists in the downtown core, the downtown business community does not agree with these findings and continues to recommend more parking. If there is indeed a lack of parking, one long-term solution might involve a permanent parking structure. A feasibility study for a permanent parking structure downtown would need to consider several factors such as existing and future needs, the type, density and rate of new development in the downtown core, the availability of property on which to locate the structure, the footprint dimensions and number of parking spaces a structure would contain, aesthetics, and who would own/operate/maintain the structure (the Town, the private sector, a combination of both or a "Parking Authority"). This last question also raises the need to study the establishment of a Parking Authority or whether another governance model should be used.

3. NEXT STEPS

If Council is in favour of adding 33 new parking spaces to the Fairy Lake Parking Lot, staff in Engineering Services will move ahead to meet with stakeholders and to convene a PIC and prepare a tender package for construction in September 2016.

The CCL Parking Sub-Committee will be meeting again before the end of June to establish the next steps to be taken in terms of other near, medium and long-term parking solutions, as well as finalizing wayfinding options for the downtown. Public input meetings with the downtown BIA, with the community in general and/or with other stakeholders will be scheduled as needed.

BUSINESS PLAN AND STRATEGIC PLAN LINKAGES

- Well Planned and Connected...strategically planning for the future

CONSULTATION

The Economic Development and Planning departments were consulted, as well as the Community Centre Lands Parking Sub-Committee. Next steps would be to meet with stakeholders such as the BIA, and others as required, and to host a Public Information Centre (PIC) to obtain feedback.

HUMAN RESOURCE CONSIDERATIONS

No impact on current staffing levels.

BUDGET IMPACT

The 33 new parking spaces at the Fairy Lake Parking Lot will cost approximately \$150,000 (about \$4,600 per space). This can be absorbed in the existing downtown parking budget.

CONTACT

For more information on this report, please contact Rachel Prudhomme, M.Sc., P.Eng. at 905-953-5300, press "2", then extension 2500; or at rprudhomme@newmarket.ca via e-mail.



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Peter Noehammer, P. Eng.
Commissioner, Development & Infrastructure Services

FIGURE 1:

Demolition of the Old Fire Hall would create nine (9) parking spaces at a cost of approximately \$12,000 per space (based on a 2014 estimate). Cost today would be more.

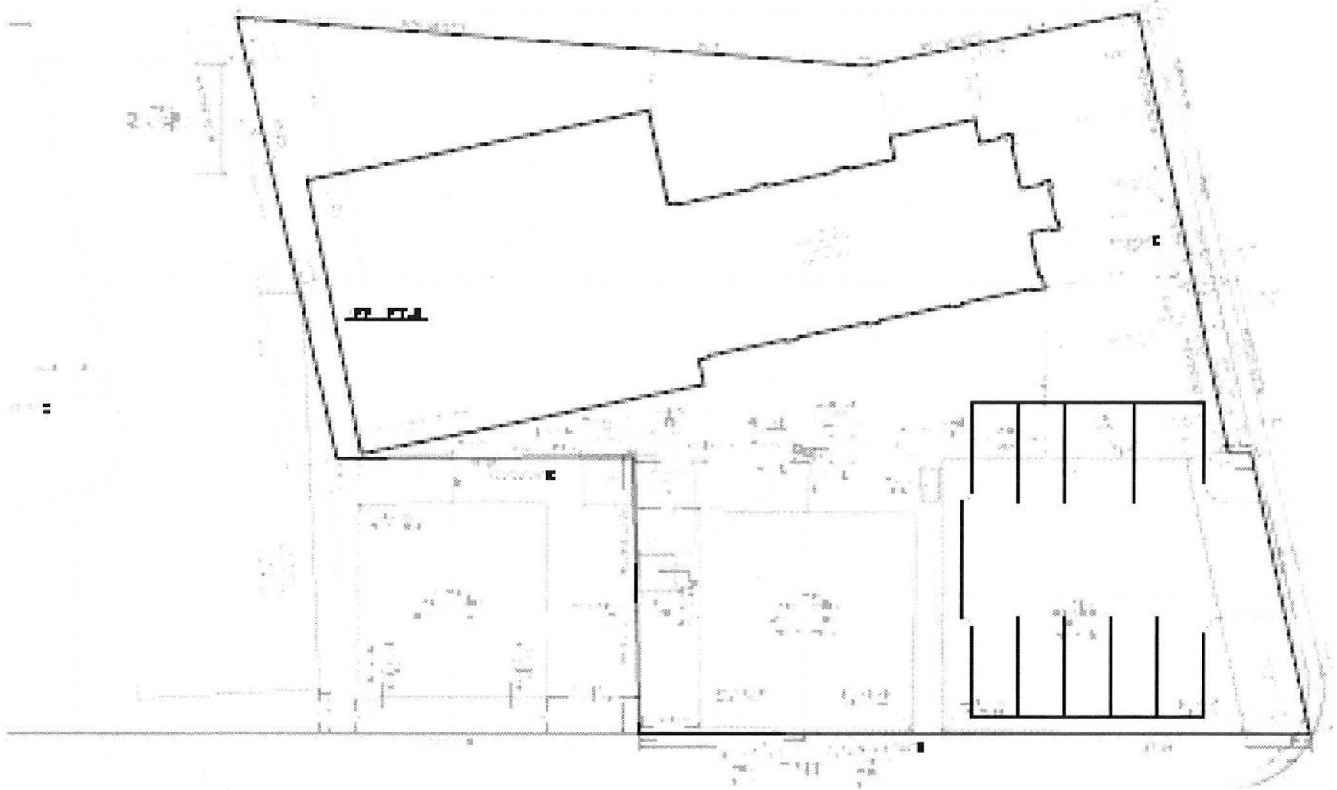


FIGURE 2:

Thirty-three (33) new parking spaces could be created at Fairy Lake at a cost of approximately \$4,600 per space (2016 estimate).

