

Toronto council rejects front-pad parking changes

Proposals called for leniency for disabled drivers, easier application process

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Attempts to change the Kafkaesque process that governs whether Torontonians can pave their front lawns and create parking spots were shot down yesterday at city hall - including a move that would have eased rules for disabled drivers.

The coveted front-pad parking spots, which dot certain central city neighbourhoods, are loved by car-owners and said to boost home values. But they are hated by environmentalists for covering green space and creating extra dirty runoff for storm sewers. New applications are already banned in downtown wards with left-leaning councillors.

After a vigorous debate on an issue that pits city councillors against each other like few others at city hall, the works committee yesterday rebuffed two proposals meant to loosen new stricter citywide rules.

One provision would have granted front-pad parking to disabled people in wards where the spots are now banned. The other that would have made it slightly easier for all applicants in other wards to seek the required approval from their neighbours.

Instead of requiring 50-per-cent participation in city-conducted polls of nearby residences to be considered valid, the proposed rules would have required only a 25-per-cent threshold.

Neither move made sense, according to Councillor Gord Perks, a long-time environmental activist who believes front-pad parking should be banned across the city.

Mr. Perks (Ward 14, Parkdale-High Park) said disabled people already have access to on-street permit parking, and in some cases reserved on-street spots near their homes. He added that council can still intervene in exceptional cases, as it did for one applicant on Bathurst Street last year.

The city would have no way of enforcing a proposed rule to have parking pads torn up if a disabled occupant moved out, he said.

Mr. Perks said the extra water runoff caused by the increasing amount of pavement across the city overwhelms storm sewers and creates huge messes, such as the flood of sewage that ruined Sunnyside Park last year.

He also warned that the increased paving over of the city's green space was causing already sweltering summer temperatures in the city to shoot up: "That puts us in the kind of temperature range where we will have the massive heat death problems that have been experienced in Central Europe and in Chicago within the last decade."

Councillor Michael Walker (Ward 22, St. Paul's) said the city should make an exception for disabled people and allow them a parking pad to save them from having to park across the street from their homes.

"It's easy for you to say you only have to cross the road. ... If you're in a wheelchair, it's a lot different," Mr. Walker said.

Councillor Sandra Bussin (Ward 32, Beaches-East York), who lifted a ban on front-pad parking in her ward, where parking is at a premium, told the committee it was only fair to reduce the threshold for neighbourhood polls.

According to city figures, 18 of 69 parking-pad appeals to the city's community councils - just to file an appeal costs close to \$700 - were launched solely because of a failure to reach the 50-per-cent participation threshold, even when the neighbours that did reply voted in favour of the parking pad.

She said the real problem is that the electoral lists compiled by the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation are "completely inaccurate," and result in countless ballots being mailed out to tenants who no longer live in the neighbourhood.

Chris Allen, a freelance television editor in the Beaches, failed last year to get approval from Toronto and East York Community Council for his existing second front-pad parking spot, which was installed long before he bought his Waverley Road house in 2006.

Now, after a six-month process, the city may force him to rip out his parking spot and replace it with grass, even though he says most of his neighbours supported his application. He says the system needs to be changed: "It's designed to fail."