

Toronto parking wars: no relief for front pad parking polls

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parking



Environmentalists on the public works committee today thwarted a bid by a fellow councillor to improve the fairness of the complicated bureaucratic process for acquiring front-yard parking in Toronto, arguing that a city-wide moratorium would be the best fix.

City staff, prompted by Councillor Sandra Bussin (Beaches East York), recommended lowering the response rate for a poll of neighbours when a front parking pad application is made to 25% from 50% – the current threshold that must be met before permission is granted.

Currently 39% of polls conducted fail to meet the mark, forcing residents who have actually secured agreement from a majority of nearby residents to launch expensive appeals for a non-refundable fee of \$658.

“It’s wrong that people are paying extra money when they actually win the poll but they can’t meet this subjective threshold,” Ms. Bussin said. “Whether you’ve got alliances or philosophical positioning, this is an issue of fairness for those residents.”

But most on the committee who oppose the paving over of front yard’s for parking in principle voted to “note and file” the proposal – effectively consigning it to the dust heap.

They argued the problem with the polls is not with the 50% benchmark but with a grossly inaccurate and outdated voters list that only the province can address.

“I actually think that the easiest solution for councillor Bussin and others would be to put a moratorium on parking pads in their wards, but that’s not what they’ve chosen to do,” said councillor Gordon Perks (Parkdale High Park), who described front-yard parking as an urban scourge that “sterilizes” sidewalks, robs neighbourhoods of on-street permit parking and even helped cause the sewage overflow at Sunnyside Park after a bad storm last summer.

“There are serious consequences to putting in parking pads throughout the city of Toronto,” Mr. Perks said. “ For example, this summer at Sunnyside Park... the boardwalk was partly washed out into lake Ontario, we had to contain a whole bunch of sewage along the park, we had to clean all the sand, we had to fix the electrical room in the swimming pool there, we had to sterilize all of the playground equipment... because we have too much hard surface in the area.”

Ms. Bussin agreed that an outdated voters list is in large part to blame, but said the province has to fix it and the city shouldn't abandon residents who follow the rules.

“We are stuck with this antiquated system and the only other way to make it a little bit fairer is to reduce the threshold,” she said. “I’ve had residents who have come down and they have photographs of all of these envelopes that are stuffed into the mailboxes and they’re all of probably tenants that lived on that street, maybe eight or nine, maybe 10 years ago.”

Parking is an explosive issue in dense Toronto. It is outlawed in outright in six downtown wards and half a seventh. It is permissible only under the strictest conditions – including a poll of neighbours – in others after the city harmonized its bylaws in 2006. But those who are denied rely on the support of their local councillor if they want to bring forth an appeal to community council. Some councillors refuse.

The city report said a 25% response rate would be “fair for applicants” and recommended refunding the appeal costs for dozens of residents – at a cost of \$11,300.

In fact, staff initially set the response rate at 25% when Toronto harmonized its parking bylaws in 2006 but council bumped it up to 50% with an amendment.