

Affordable car housing not the answer

Re: Guelph councillors approve \$20.4 million Wilson Street parkade - July 20¹.

Last time I checked, we were living in 2017. So, as a sustainable transportation planner, it is frustrating to see Guelph staff and council mired in 1950s's thinking – this time in regards to the Wilson Street Parkade (WSP).

They have voted to spend over \$20 million on affordable housing (plus lost development taxes) for almost 500 cars. That is over \$51,000 per new stall. If drivers are paying only \$2/hour (and less by monthly permit), that is very affordable car housing.

We know that cities and cars, especially in a densifying downtown, don't mix. Millennials would rather be on their cellphones than drive while council has set transit and cycling targets of 15% and 3% respectively. More parking will ensure the city doesn't meet these targets (which are currently at 6% and 1%) while automated vehicles will mean that the WSP is obsolete by 2040.

Some council members were elected on platforms saving tax dollars but they've already voted to overspend tens of millions of dollars on the Laird Interchange, Speedvale reconstruction, Niska Road and other schemes. Transportation projects usually go over budget so, before adding an additional \$7 million to the \$13.37 million that was originally requested for the parkade, council and staff should have asked critical questions:

1. Are there alternatives to WSP? For example, have they spoken with Our Lady of Lourdes and the Hamilton Diocese about using their lot which is empty most of the week.
2. Have they chatted with parking experts in Albany, Des Moines, San Francisco, Calgary and Pittsburgh about true market based parking prices which stops the need for outdated parking structures and reduces paid by-law officers? When drivers don't receive tickets for illegal parking and generated revenues are dedicated to street level improvements and beautification, everyone is happy. Guelph would get a great start on a cutting edge parking system by allocating \$15 million of the \$20.4 million for this purpose. I'm sure the province and feds would help out.
3. If the other \$5.4 million was set aside for a real Transportation Demand Management program working directly with the Downtown Business Association (parking cash out, guaranteed ride home service, transit passes, bike security), we could really start managing transportation demand instead of trying to tweak systems to accommodate it.

I hold out hope that the WSP proposal will be sent back to staff for further study in the context of the Transportation Master Plan which is to be completed by 2019. The new council that is voted in next year will then be given a chance to reflect and understand the ramifications of this \$20.4 million parking decision. Future generations of Guelphites will thank council as well.

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¹ <https://www.guelphmercury.com/news-story/7428700-guelph-councillors-approve-20-4-million-wilson-street-parkade/>