

Council Orders Up Drive Thru Restrictions

Whether grabbing lunch on the go or depositing money at your local bank branch, drive thru windows serve one primary purpose—convenience. What’s convenient, however, isn’t always practical. This is especially true in the more populated areas of Oakville.

The Town currently follows a set of Urban Design Study Guidelines that were adopted by Council in 2003. Their intent was to ensure drive thru facilities were developed with minimal impact to adjacent areas, conducive to functional and safe traffic movement and attractive to the overall streetscape.

Since the adoption of these policies, there have been a number of Ontario Municipal Board (OMB) hearings, as well as municipal experiences, that have prompted changes to the legislation used to both prohibit and regulate drive thru structures in Ontario. In fact, many more drive thru restrictions have been introduced across North America as the number of building applications continues to increase.

Says Barb Koopmans, Manager, Current Planning and Urban Design, “Drive thrus pose specific design challenges. From a planning standpoint, we need to consider the traffic safety issues associated with vehicle and pedestrian circulation and conflicts between access to the site and queuing. Drive thru lanes can be quite dangerous for pedestrians. As well, we need to think about the environmental impact of idling cars. Noise is another important factor.” Further complicating things, many locations have multiple drive thrus on premise.

As the drive thru quandary has not officially been revisited since 2005, Council passed an interim control by-law (allowable under the Planning Act) on November 10, 2008. Such legislation allows the Town to restrict drive thru developments on certain lands, within certain zones, until an appropriate investigative study has been completed.

“Our ultimate goal is to implement appropriate regulations to govern the locations and ensure the functionality of drive thrus,” says Koopmans. “We recognize they are especially important to parents with small children and to those who have accessibility or mobility issues. The purpose of our study is to evaluate their legitimate uses and make the appropriate recommendations for future planning.” Rulings in other municipalities, OMB decisions, recent site applications and existing facilities will all be considered in the earlier part of 2009.

The public is encouraged to participate in this important undertaking. Drive thrus are not specifically addressed in the Town’s Official Plan, though they will continue to present challenges as future growth is expected to come from built up areas of the community. Email danderson@oakville.ca or contact the Planning Department at 905.845.6601 to give an explanation of when/why you use a drive thru, as well as to voice your concerns.