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London doesn't have an issue yet but maybe we should think cars on shelves



By Jennifer O'Brien, The London Free Press
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The photograph shows, along with more traditional parking, an example of stacked parking, which London is investigating.

Finally. The solution to a problem . . . well, a problem London doesn't really seem to have.

Not yet anyway.

But in an effort to keep up with the latest parking technology, city staff want London to allow stacked parking — a concept found in more bustling places such as New York.

Think cars on shelves.

“It’s a real space saver,” city planner John Fleming said. “It’s something that exists in other municipalities, but we haven’t seen it used in London yet and the zoning bylaws haven’t caught up to the new technology that exists out there.”

Also called mechanical parking, stacked parking requires an automated process. Basically you park your car on a lift that — once you are out of it — elevates the vehicle and guides it into a specific parking stall above a vehicle in a spot below.

It’s fairly new, but has been used in some big cities where parking is in high demand.

“I wouldn’t say there is a parking crunch in London, simply there is a new technology and the zoning bylaw doesn’t anticipate it and there are people who are interested in using it,” Fleming said.

A few developers have recently inquired about stacked parking capabilities, he said.

The city, Fleming said, doesn’t have any information or rules about building lots with mechanical spaces.

The concept is still rare in North America. In fact, while researching the idea, city staff surveyed 11 Ontario municipalities and found only one — Toronto — has zoning bylaws that regulate the use of stacked parking spaces.

On Tuesday, the city’s planning committee will vote on staff’s recommendation to amend the zoning bylaw so it allows for stacked parking spaces to meet parking standards required by the city.

It’s about time, planning committee chair Bud Polhill said.

“There are other cities that do it, and it’s time to get into the 21st century,” he said.

“It’s a good idea. I think it’s necessary, and some people downtown will start taking advantage,” he said. “If you have 60 spots, you could do it and get 180 cars in there.”

Once stacked parking is defined in the bylaw, the city can outline general requirements and require a “functional parking study” be undertaken for each proposed mechanical parking site.

“As you can imagine with an automated facility like this, you may get noise, you may get vibrations . . . This is something beyond your traditional parking requirement,” Fleming said.

Concerns have already been raised about the impact such parking could have on traffic in an area, as well as the noise and vibrations that could be associated with the constant use of hydraulic lifts.

It makes perfect sense for the city to be ready for such requests, said Jason Gilliland, Western University’s director of urban development.

“I don’t see a big demand for it and I don’t think you’ll see a big rush to do it because it’s costly, but I see absolutely no reason why not to allow it in the official plan,” he said.

“I think it makes sense in New York or Chicago or other big cities,” he said. “I don’t see a real need here, but it’s always a good thing to make accommodations.”

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Stacked parking

- Also called mechanical or automated parking.
- System designed to minimize the area required for parked cars
- Uses a hydraulic lift system to load vehicles into parking spaces above other vehicles.