



100 John West Way  
Aurora, Ontario  
L4G 6J1  
(905) 727-3123  
aurora.ca

Town of Aurora

## Committee of the Whole Report

No. CMS24-014

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**Subject:** Petch House – Considerations - Update

**Prepared by:** Robin McDougall, Director of Community Services

**Department:** Community Services

**Date:** May 7, 2024

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### Recommendation

1. That Report No. CMS24-014 be received; and
2. That Council approve the proposed renovations of the Petch House; and
3. That a new capital project with budget authority of \$50,000 be approved to be funded from the Heritage reserve fund.

### Executive Summary

As per Council direction, this report provides the feedback received from the Heritage Advisory Committee (HAC) regarding the proposed use and renovations of the Petch House.

- Feedback received from the Heritage Advisory Committee was generally in favour of the proposed use of the Petch House, however, they provided a few suggestions for future consideration.

### Background

Through staff report CMS24-005 on February 20, 2024, staff provided an update for Council on the proposed use of the Petch House as a Wedding Chapel. The report also shared the anticipated renovations needed to make the facility functional. Based on the current anticipated interest, starting with minimal improvements (accessibility upgrades, electrical, security, flooring, and décor) would enable the Petch House to be used on a seasonal basis for a Wedding Chapel. This type of use also falls within the parameters of the building code by using it seasonally and short term and would cost

approximately \$50,000. The basic improvements would not prevent a more extensive renovation (adding HVAC and washrooms) at an approximate cost of \$250,000 in the future if the demand became apparent. If a more extensive renovation was to be done, the building code would need to be revisited to make sure the facility meets the requirements, and it would be important to return to the Heritage Advisory Committee for their review of the additional renovations.

During the discussion, Council directed staff to return the Heritage Advisory Committee to obtain their input on the proposed use and renovations.

## **Analysis**

**Feedback received from the Heritage Advisory Committee was generally in favour of the proposed use of the Petch House, however, they provided a few suggestions for future consideration**

Staff provided a summary of the discussion regarding the use of the Petch House (or lack there of) over the years since it was moved to its current location.

It currently stands as a shell and lacks some basic needs to make it functional (e.g. electrical, accessible entrance, flooring, etc.). Based on previous consultations, a wedding chapel was one idea that has generated some discussion about the possibilities. With the proposed seasonal use (April to October) basic improvements are recommended.

The HAC members provided the following comments:

- Discussion took place around what else it could be used for. It was noted that previous consultations have taken place, but with its small size (capacity limits), lack of washrooms, lack of HVAC, non-accessible, its use was limited without at least some minimal improvements.
- Suggestion that the Petch House has a significant history and deserves more prominence. Signage and education material could be incorporated at the site and within Town promotions.
- Concern that the heritage reserve fund may not be the right source of funding as the improvements suggested are not heritage related. Others felt that the heritage reserve was the right source of funding as the improvements proposed will enable the historic building to be utilized bringing more attention to a facility that is currently underutilized.

- If heritage reserve fund was to be used, there was a suggestion that possibly some of the revenue collected could be used to replenish the reserve.
- Consideration of the Petch House being moved to the Hillary House property to be incorporated with a larger Museum property. Staff noted the cost that was incurred to move it to its current location and that it would be an additional cost to move it again, but Council could consider that if they felt it was important and the Aurora Historical Society were consulted on the idea.
- Committee demonstrated favourable support for the idea of the wedding chapel type use, while encouraging the incorporation of the historical significance in the story telling of the building.
- Would the lack of air conditioning be a limiting factor for the seasonal use? Clients would be made aware of the lack of A/C at application time. Windows and doors could be left open during the service to provide air flow along with electric fans. It was also shared that the services are usually no longer than 15 minutes in duration. If this became a real issue, for short term needs, a window A/C could be installed to help provide basic relief.

Generally, the HAC was in support of the wedding chapel use of the Petch House and were happy to see that the facility would be utilized. They were also in support of finding ways to make the Petch House more prominent. This could be through additional messaging, and signage promoting the historical significance of the building.

If the demand and interest increased, the HAC would like to explore the future possibilities. Ultimately, having a historic property celebrated and appreciated by the community is a priority.

## **Advisory Committee Review**

Staff brought the report to the Heritage Advisory Committee for their review and consideration on April 8, 2024. Their feedback has been provided in the above section of this report.

## **Legal Considerations**

The proposed change of use to this facility will not impact the Town's 2024 insurance premium. If the value of the building increases as a result of the proposed renovations, there may be a small increase to the Town's insurance premium in 2025.

It is recommended that wedding couples book the Petch House through the Town's Facility Permit Booking system to ensure there is adequate liability insurance in place.

## **Financial Implications**

At this time staff recommend the above noted basic improvements to this structure totalling approximately \$50,000. If Council is supportive of these improvements, it is recommended that it approve the creation of a new capital project with \$50,000 in budget authority. And, that this capital budget authority be funded from the Heritage reserve fund. With a present balance of \$330,700, this reserve contains sufficient reserves to fund this project. Further, these expenditures would be eligible for funding from this reserve.

The proposed improvements to the Petch House will enable the town to generate incremental operating revenue for the Town. At this time, it is difficult to estimate how much revenue is possible.

## **Communications Considerations**

Should the Petch House be converted to a wedding chapel, Corporate Communications will work closely with Access Aurora Manager, the Town's wedding officiant to promote the facility as a venue. This will be done by utilizing the Town website, social media, wedding tourism brochures and other promotional materials that could be used to promote our wedding services at bridal shows and other community engagement events.

## **Climate Change Considerations**

None.

## **Link to Strategic Plan**

The conversion of the Petch House supports the Strategic Plan goal of supporting an exceptional quality of life for all through its accomplishment in satisfying requirements in the following key objective:

Strengthening the fabric of our community: The conversion of the Petch House will provide a unique and desirable community use.

## **Alternative(s) to the Recommendation**

1. Council provide further direction.

## **Conclusions**

With feedback received from the Heritage Advisory Committee demonstrating support for the use of the Petch House as a wedding chapel, staff would recommend proceeding with the minimal improvements as outlined in report CMS24-005. At the same time, staff would ensure messaging and promotion of the historical significance of the Petch House is created and displayed at the site and through other promotions.

Additional enhancements could be considered in the future once we have more information about actual uptake on the Petch House being used in this manner.

Staff will work to implement Council's approval and proceed with the appropriate next steps.

## **Attachments**

None.

## **Previous Reports**

February 20, 2024 – CMS24-005 – Petch House – Considerations

April 17, 2018 - PDS18-038 - Petch House – Potential Conversion to a Wedding Chapel Use

## **Pre-submission Review**

Agenda Management Team review on April 18, 2024

## **Approvals**

Approved by Robin McDougall, Director, Community Services

Approved by Doug Nadorozny, Chief Administrative Officer