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Town of Aurora  
**Committee of the Whole Report**  
No. PDS24-107

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**Subject:** Doors Open 2025 Registration

**Prepared by:** Adam Robb, MPL, MCIP, RPP, CAHP  
Manager, Policy Planning and Heritage

**Department:** Planning and Development Services

**Date:** October 1, 2024

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## Recommendation

1. That Report No. PDS24-107 be received; and
2. That Council provide direction regarding registration with the Ontario Heritage Trust to hold an in-person Doors Open event in 2025.

## Executive Summary

This report provides consideration for Council regarding the registration and organization of an in-person Doors Open event in 2025.

- The last in-person Doors Open event for the Town took place in 2019, and since then, the Town has been participating in digital Doors Open.
- The Town's Heritage Advisory Committee has expressed support for the Town to pursue an in-person Doors Open event for 2025.
- Organizing an in-person Doors Open event will require significant staff time and resources to meet the Ontario Heritage Trust's program criteria and expectations.
- Some municipalities have initiated alternative options to Doors Open, including their own independent events.

## Background

**The last in-person Doors Open event for the Town took place in 2019, and since then, the Town has been participating in digital Doors Open.**

The Town held its last in-person Doors Open event on August 17, 2019. The 2019 event recorded 2,500 site visits amongst 14 participating locations. This represented a decrease of about 500 visitors from the 2018 event, which had a recorded 3,000 site visits. Preparations were also commencing for the 2020 event, until the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In 2020, the Ontario Heritage Trust transitioned Doors Open to a digital format that provides virtual tours of sites. Participation in digital Doors Open is free, with the Town participating in this on an ongoing basis since 2020 and anticipated to continue to participate in 2025. Website visitor tracking data is not managed by the Town, but a digital presence has been recognized as serving a wide-ranging audience.

## Analysis

**The Town's Heritage Advisory Committee has expressed support for the Town to pursue an in-person Doors Open event for 2025.**

At the Town's Heritage Advisory Committee meeting on June 10, 2024, a public delegation was received about returning to an in-person Doors Open event for the Town in 2025. The delegation also made recommendations regarding the re-establishment of a working committee, collaborating with multiple departments, and improving marketing to build meaningful experiences through the event.

The Heritage Advisory Committee expressed support for the initiative and promotion of heritage tourism in Aurora. Other general discussion also occurred on potential alternative options for heritage related events instead of Doors Open, such as independently led community events or walking tours that do not necessarily require registration with the Ontario Heritage Trust. Ultimately, it is recognized that the Doors Open event does provide a level of 'brand recognition' for the Town but the event is expected to meet the program criteria and requirements that are assigned by the Ontario Heritage Trust.

**Organizing Doors Open will require significant staff time and resources to meet the Ontario Heritage Trust's program criteria and expectations.**

In addition to the formal registration process and costs associated with registration (2024 registration was open until March 31 and cost \$1,500, with an early-bird rate of \$1,000 if prior to January 31), the Ontario Heritage Trust further lists the following criteria that a community must meet in order to host an in-person event:

- The formation of an organizing committee that consists of a range of community partners from the tourism, heritage, corporate, municipal, and cultural sectors
- The appointment of a designated lead contact to co-ordinate, manage, and act as an ongoing liaison with the Ontario Heritage Trust
- Selection and scheduling of a single-day or two-day slot for the event fixed between April and October
- The coordination of a minimum of 10 sites to be included in the event, with owners to be consulted and primary event images to be captured for each site, and descriptions to be provided and sent to the Ontario Heritage Trust
- Requiring that the first three sites be selected and submitted prior to March 31<sup>st</sup>
- The soliciting of potential sponsorship opportunities, as necessary
- The creation of information pamphlets for each site, as visitors must receive information about all participating locations
- Promotion and site selection based on the Doors Open event theme, as assigned by the Ontario Heritage Trust. Previous year themes include sports, women's rights, or military history, for example.
- The creation of marketing material, with it also being a requirement that all marketing materials acknowledge the Ontario Heritage Trust
- Volunteer recruitment and management
- Ensuring that each participating site holds adequate liability insurance coverage to participate in a public event
- Ensuring that all health and safety requirements of each participating site is met and reviewed in advance
- Ensuring that all visitations to each site on the day of the event are tracked
- Preparing and submitting a final event evaluation form to the Ontario Heritage Trust

The last in-person 2019 Doors Open event had a total estimated cost of \$3,195, but it is expected that costs since 2019 will have risen marginally, and that a 2025 event could likely be pursued with an overall expenditure in the range of \$3,000 to \$5,000. This

figure does not include costs for staff time or resources. Historically, a full-time staff member has been dedicated to the preparation of Doors Open as one of their primary tasks, and the event was typically held in August to optimize as much staffing assistance as possible from summer students.

**Some municipalities have initiated alternative options to Doors Open, including hosting their own independent events.**

Since 2019, the number of municipalities that have registered for in-person Doors Open events with the Ontario Heritage Trust has declined. 36 in-person events were held in 2019 compared to 29 in-person events being held in 2024. This could be attributed to the new digital Doors Open format that was launched or due in part to an emerging trend that has seen Doors Open events instead be held at the regional level, with examples in 2024 including Waterloo Region and Simcoe County, amongst others across the Province. Durham Region has also recently hosted their own independent and self-directed event similar to Doors Open that did not involve registration or coordination with the Ontario Heritage Trust.

Within York Region, in-person Doors Open events for 2024 were held by Markham, Vaughan, Richmond Hill, and Whitchurch-Stouffville, with these events largely being organized and led by their respective museum and cultural programming/events staff. Some municipalities also include Doors Open as part of Culture Days.

Should Council authorize registering for an in-person Doors Open event in 2025, coordination between multiple departments would occur regarding the organization and management of the event. Due to capital project commitments anticipated over 2025, Planning and Development Services may not be able to be the direct lead for the event but would still be able to provide support and assistance, including through the preparation of property descriptions, sharing of materials, or having a role as part of the general working committee.

Since 2019, the Town has also expanded its events and cultural programming portfolio. An independently led Town event or walking tour, perhaps as part of Culture Days, could instead be considered as an alternative option that would provide more adaptability and autonomy for the Town and not require registration with the Ontario Heritage Trust. This independent program/event could also be monitored over the years moving forward to ensure its success and feasibility.

## **Advisory Committee Review**

The Town's Heritage Advisory Committee received a public delegation at its meeting on June 10, 2024, and expressed support for pursuing an in-person Doors Open event for 2025.

## **Legal Considerations**

None.

## **Financial Implications**

Costs for registering and operating an in-person Doors Open event are anticipated to be between \$3,000 and \$5,000, which excludes staff time and resources that would also be involved. Costs may be covered through the Town's Heritage Reserve Fund or an alternative source. The current balance of the Heritage Reserve Fund is \$292,793.

## **Communications Considerations**

Should the Town pursue an in-person Doors Open event for 2025, extensive advertising and outreach would occur including through print materials, social media, signage and online engagement. Communications staff would also be heavily involved in the organization of the event.

## **Climate Change Considerations**

None.

## **Link to Strategic Plan**

The promotion of heritage resources supports the Strategic Plan goal of Supporting an Exceptional Quality of Life for All through its accomplishment in satisfying requirements in the objective of Celebrating and Promoting our Culture.

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

1. Should Council not authorize registration for an in-person Doors Open event, other alternative options can be considered, such as independent walking tours or events that do not require any registration with the Ontario Heritage Trust.

## **Conclusions**

Council can choose to authorize staff to register for an in-person event for Doors Open 2025, which would involve a cost of approximately \$3,000 to \$5,000 dollars as well as dedicated staff time and resources across multiple departments.

## **Attachments**

None.

## **Previous Reports**

PDS19-101 – Doors Open Aurora 2019 Event Summary Report

## **Pre-submission Review**

Agenda Management Team review on September 12, 2024

## **Approvals**

**Approved by Marco Ramunno, Director, Planning and Development Services**

**Approved by Doug Nadorozny, Chief Administrative Officer**