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Town of Aurora

## Memorandum

Planning and Development Services

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**Re:** Heritage Permit Application HPA-2025-01 – Happy Woodland Pet Cemetery (14314-14378 Yonge Street)

**To:** Heritage Advisory Committee

**From:** Adam Robb, MPL, MCIP, RPP, CAHP, PLE  
Manager, Policy Planning and Heritage

**Date:** February 3, 2025

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### Recommendation

1. That the memorandum regarding Heritage Permit Application HPA-2025-01 – Happy Woodland Pet Cemetery (14314-14378 Yonge Street) be received; and
2. That the Heritage Advisory Committee comments regarding Heritage Permit Application HPA-2025-01 be received and referred to staff for consideration and further action as appropriate.

### Background

The Happy Woodland Pet Cemetery began under the ownership of the Blochin family. Victor Blochin was a prisoner of war in Germany, where during his capture, he became friends with another captive, Angus Campbell, the Lord of Dunstaffnage Castle in Scotland. After the war ended, Blochin moved with Campbell to Scotland to work as a gardener at the castle. Campbell was a breeder of West Highland White Terriers and gifted one to Blochin. By the 1920s, Blochin left for Canada, taking a number of Westie dogs with him. Blochin settled on the subject property and opened a kennel. Victor and his wife Anne began burying their beloved pets on the property, and over time others began too as well. The burials are marked by a number of various gravestones of all different sizes and materials.

The property was designated under the Ontario Heritage Act in 2023 and maintains a legacy as the first pet cemetery in Canada.

## Analysis

With the property now designated, alterations are to be reviewed by the Heritage Advisory Committee and receive Council approval.

The proposed work is intended to continue to enhance the property through key restoration efforts that will preserve its historical significance and prepare for future public access. These efforts include the following:

### 1) Pathway Reconstruction

- The original path stones have been uncovered and are partially restored, but the overall path system through the site remains incomplete. The proposed reconstruction with fieldstone and permeable foundations will ensure stability and longevity while complementing and preserving the original aesthetic. Reconstruction of the pathways is essential before any monument relocation can occur.

### 2) Monument Relocation and Restoration

- During the later years of operation, approximately 140 monuments were relocated to grids A5 and A6. These will be redistributed throughout the cemetery. This relocation will follow identified patterns based on in-depth GPS data, starting in the less dense east side and moving westward, and prioritizing featured perimeters.
- Archival footage from 1966 also reveals that many monuments, presently laid flat, were originally standing or leaning. These will be safely repositioned in line with the site's original historic appearance.

### 3) Addressing Problematic Monuments

- Six monuments feature inscriptions with racially offensive language. Recommendations for remediations include:
  - a) Replacing the original monuments with modified replicas
  - b) Re-engraving the blank side of the monuments with a modified inscription and then laying the problematic side face down
  - c) Removing the offensive language from the existing monuments outright through sandblasting.

If the original monument is entirely removed, it should be returned to the earth or disposed of. These monuments will not be used for future exhibitions or programming. Feedback from the Heritage Advisory Committee is encouraged regarding a preferred method.

#### 4) Landscape Maintenance and Design Elements

- To prepare the site for future full public access, several landscaping improvements are needed:
  - Permanent seating and fencing
  - Interpretive signage
  - Tree Pruning and servicing
  - Decorative plantings
  - Retaining walls or other features for stabilizing the site

These updates will ensure the property remains accessible, safe, and respectful of its historical significance.

The recommended alterations as listed above are necessary to restore the site to its intended form. Feedback from the Heritage Advisory Committee is being sought to inform any additional considerations of the work that is proposed.

### **Attachments**

1. Attachment #1 – Summary of Restoration Work
2. Attachment #2 – Air Photo of Property