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Town of Aurora

Memorandum

Planning and Development Services

Re: Summary of the 2026 Heritage Week Event

To: Heritage Advisory Committee

From: Adam Robb, Manager, Policy Planning and Heritage

Date: April 13, 2026

Recommendation

1. That the memorandum regarding Summary of the 2026 Heritage Week Event be received; and
2. That the Heritage Advisory Committee comments regarding Summary of the 2026 Heritage Week Event be received and referred to staff for consideration and further action as appropriate.

Background

The Town's 2026 Heritage Week Event was held on Family Day, February 16, 2026, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. The event was hosted at Town Square and featured an opening ceremony, curated artistic displays, live music, information booths and multiple speaking engagements.

Analysis

The 2026 Heritage Week Event offered a variety of programming and had 296 visitors.

The program schedule and offerings of the Heritage Week Event included:

- 1) Opening Ceremonies
 - Opening remarks by the organizing working group
 - Speeches by elected officials
 - Singing of O Canada by a local student volunteer
 - Proclamation of Heritage Week by the Town Crier

2) Presentations and Speaking Engagements

- “Once Upon a Time: The Postcards of Olde Aurora” by Bob McRoberts, local historian and Heritage Advisory Committee Member
- “The Great Aurora Built Heritage Quiz” by Jacqueline Stuart, former curator of the Aurora Museum
- “Discovering the Stories of Horton Place” a recorded interview discussion with John McIntyre, former President of the Aurora Historical Society

3) Information Booths

- “Echoes of Aurora: Bridging Past and Present” with Museum staff on-site and offering tours of the Aurora Room exhibit
- The Postcards of Olde Aurora collection by Bob McRoberts
- Booths by the Olde Aurora Ratepayers Association, the Aurora Historical Society, and Heritage Planning and the Heritage Advisory Committee

4) Live Music and Artistic Curation by David Heard of Dave’s Vinyl Party

- “Music, Ambience, Love and Heritage”, being a live motivational historic vinyl presentation
- “A Tribute to the Aurora Horse Show – A ‘Mane’ Attraction”, an over 100 square foot artistic display honouring the historic Aurora Horse Show
- “Aurora’s Connection to The Beatles’ Sgt. Pepper”, featuring a uniquely curated display on the connection of the band and Sgt. Pepper to Aurora

Visitor counters recorded 296 attendees to the Heritage Week Event at Town Square. The primary Heritage Week event was featured on February 16, 2026, but additional offerings were also provided throughout the duration of the week itself. A self-guided tour of Aurora’s Northeast Old Aurora Heritage Conservation District was developed, in coordination with the Hillary House National Historic Site and Koffler Museum of Medicine occurred to offer free admission during the week, and discounts to the Flashback Friday: Night at the Museum were also provided. The self-guided tour was intentionally developed to have visitors finish at the Hillary House, where free admission to the museum was being offered. The Aurora Historical Society indicated that there were 26 attendees to Hillary House across ten touring groups, which is the most visitors during this period of February since the inception of digital attendance records over a decade ago.

The total cost of the event was approximately \$650, which was primarily made up of costs for printing and advertising. These printing and advertising costs were due to this

event being inaugural in nature, and it is anticipated that some of these initial print materials can be re-used in future offerings.

Sincere appreciation is extended to the Heritage Advisory Committee and Organizing Committee members Cynthia Bettio, John Green and Rocco Morsillo, volunteers, the performers/speakers listed above, participants including the Aurora Historical Society and Museum, and attendees who made this Heritage Week Event possible.

Visitor feedback on the 2026 Heritage Week Event was positive

Direct discussions with visitors at the Heritage Week Event indicated high levels of enjoyment and satisfaction. QR codes were also posted and advertised on the day of the event allowing visitors to complete an online survey and provide feedback. Fourteen online survey responses were received, with 93 per cent of survey respondents rating the event as either 'Excellent' (65 per cent) or 'Very Good' (28 per cent). This survey was supplemental to the on-the-ground feedback received from attendees, which again was largely positive. Additionally, it is acknowledged that the event had economic benefits to the local community, as visitors indicated they frequented local eateries before, during, and after the event. Vendors also indicated positive feedback from attendees and there was positive media coverage and awareness leading up to the event and after.

More dedicated resources are required to ensure the ongoing and future success of Heritage Week and other related events

Aurora was one of the only municipalities across the province to organize and host a dedicated event for Heritage Week through its Heritage Advisory Committee and planning and development services staff. The majority of events or offerings across the province were organized/led by local libraries, dedicated committees, museums, historical societies or other independent cultural and non-profit groups.

This matter is being raised, as despite the initial success of the 2026 Heritage Week Event, its organization was only made possible by the volunteerism and efforts of the organizing Committee members, the presenters, David Heard, and the redeployment of planning and development services staff/resources. Planning and development services staff will be limited in the ability to continue to lead and manage such Special Events, particularly as other priority department projects are forecasted. For example, Planning/Heritage Staff will be managing the Town's Comprehensive Zoning By-law Review capital project and the Yonge Street South Land Use Study in 2027, which will limit the ability to also be the primary lead in the organizing of a Heritage Week event.

The Heritage Advisory Committee membership is also subject to variability from term to term, and the leading of events is generally beyond the Terms of Reference and statutory function of the Committee being to advise on *Ontario Heritage Act* matters. Planning and Development Services staff and the Heritage Advisory Committee can still certainly assist with and participate in such events, but remaining in the lead role from an event management and organizing perspective as the event grows is beyond existing capacity and scope. There also continues to be a desire for further additional events, such as celebrating Town milestones or significant anniversaries, which again will require more dedicated and specialized event management attention.

This again is being raised as the ongoing long-term success of Heritage Week and related events will specifically depend on the ability to offer fresh and diverse programming, which will require even greater and more dedicated attention to items such as vendor recruitment, venue/space booking, volunteer management, website development, branding, promotion and marketing etc. moving forward. While successful in its inaugural capacity, the Heritage Week Event runs the risk of potentially losing interest over time if not continually offering fresh/diverse programming and being given dedicated event management attention. Therefore, Planning staff will be requesting the assistance of other departments/divisions, community organizations or other groups to lead such special events moving forward. Otherwise, the Heritage Week Event may potentially have to be held biennially or in a limited capacity depending on other planning and development services department priorities from year to year.

Attachments

None.