



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

Town of Aurora

General Committee Report

No. CMS24-005

Subject: Petch House - Considerations

Prepared by: Robin McDougall, Director, Community Services

Department: Community Services

Date: February 20, 2024

Recommendation

1. That Report No. CMS24-005 be received; and
2. That Council approve the proposed renovations of the Petch House; and
3. That a new capital project with capital budget authority of \$50,000 be approved; to be funded from the Heritage reserve fund

Executive Summary

This report is to provide information to Council on the costs associated with converting the Petch House at 86 John West Way into a seasonal wedding chapel facility.

- On October 23, 2012, the Building Division issued a building permit for the relocation of the Petch House to 86 John West Way
- The wedding chapel use has been consulted upon and its feasibility investigated
- Current demand and expanding Civil Ceremony services demonstrates an opportunity for the Petch House
- Based on current demand, minimal upgrades and improvements are needed to make the Petch House viable as a wedding chapel on a seasonal basis

Background

On October 23, 2012, the Building Division issued a building permit for the relocation of the Petch House to 86 John West Way

The Petch House was originally constructed in 1840 and is one of Aurora's oldest buildings, displaying some of the earliest construction methods brought to Canada Pre-Confederation. The Petch House was originally located at 15395 Leslie Street on farmland and then was relocated to its current location at 86 John West Way.

The building permit was issued as a shell building with no defined proposed use. The building remains without a defined use today. Over the last number of years, it has been primarily used for storage due to its facility limitations.

Analysis

The wedding chapel use has been consulted upon and its feasibility investigated

At the February 27, 2018, meeting of Town Council, Council passed a resolution to investigate the feasibility and costs for the Petch House to be used for municipal civil wedding ceremonies and serve the community as a wedding chapel.

On April 17, 2018, Report PDS18-038 was presented to Council outlining the costs associated with the conversion to a wedding chapel either seasonally or year-round. The cost estimates reflected in this report are derived from the estimates as previously presented in report PDS18-038 but are increased to account for inflationary changes.

As directed by Council, the Town's Heritage Advisory Committee has also been consulted multiple times regarding the wedding chapel use. On November 2, 2020, the Heritage Advisory Committee provided comments and questions regarding matters including impacts if HVAC is installed, whether a washroom would be required, and the impact to parking for the Seniors' Centre. Further consultation and reporting back occurred on April 6, 2021, which outlined that HVAC would only be required if marriage ceremonies are carried out year-round, and that the installation can be done in a manner that is still sympathetic to the heritage and design of the building. There are also minimal anticipated impacts to parking, particularly if the use is only seasonal with a maximum occupancy load determined by the Ontario Building Code. Staff also noted that the average attendance at a municipal civil wedding ceremony is approximately five people. Washroom facilities would not be required on site as weddings would occur during normal Town Hall business hours from 8:30am to 4:30 and the wedding

customers would meet with their officiant at the Town hall entrance. The Heritage Advisory Committee is generally supportive of introducing a use to the Petch House, and through consultation also suggested cross-programming opportunities be considered, including for school groups, information centres or meetings. The Heritage Advisory Committee is expected to continue to be consulted with on any detailed design and renovation matters moving forward as appropriate.

Current demand and expanding Civil Ceremony services demonstrates an opportunity for the Petch House

Since 2018, and even with a pandemic impacting possible interest, the Town's provision of civil ceremonies continues to rise. During the pandemic, the Town of Aurora was one of few municipalities that continued to offer and perform civil ceremonies in a small and safe intimate style to meet current trends for basic ceremonies, inter-faith ceremonies and legal ceremonies for larger destination weddings. Stats have shown that the demand for this type of basic wedding service are on a favourable incline notably, the Town conducted 45 civil ceremonies in 2023. The current setting for these ceremonies is within the government setting of Council Chambers and has limited availability, currently operating one afternoon per week. The Petch House could be a positive alternative location enabling the set-up to remain between ceremonies and increase availability of civil ceremonies which would increase revenue. As it is now, ceremonies have been restricted to Friday's in order to mitigate the amount of turnover within the space ensuring the Chambers is always available to provide its primary purpose of municipal business.

The Petch House is a desirable location for small weddings due to its central location to Town Hall, local restaurants, highway access points and natural green space for wedding photos. Guests would check-in at Town Hall with Access Aurora and the delegated wedding officiant would accompany the wedding party to the Petch House to conduct the service. The Petch House would also be well used for pictures along with the Arboretum entrance and trail area for a natural private setting. Wedding staff would encourage the wedding guests to use the Town Hall public washrooms versus the Seniors Centre location, so it is less disruptive to seniors programming.

Based on the short duration of each civil ceremony (less than 30 minutes per service), it would be staff's recommendation to proceed with minimal improvements to the Petch House. Future additional enhancements could be considered if demand for civil ceremonies continues to rise, however, for the current expected use, a minimal level of work is needed to make this space a functioning wedding chapel, that is marketable for

the current trends in the wedding service industry (rustic, private/intimate, wedding ready with no additional cost of rentals for couples looking for a small space).

Based on current demand, minimal upgrades and improvements are needed to make the Petch House viable as a wedding chapel on a seasonal basis

Currently, the Petch House is a basic structure (board formed) with windows and doors and is 775 square feet. The space is not currently equipped with any electrical fixtures or lighting. Lighting fixtures controlled by a wall switch will be required to illuminate the interior space. There is an existing electric panel box located in the building. This panel box will be required to be isolated from any public areas. Also, the building has been placed on a concrete slab that is approximately 8 inches lower than the entrance doors. To upgrade the facility to provide a level access, a wooden flooring system needs to be added. The system would be installed on top of the existing slab flooring, then a plywood surface would be finished with a durable flooring product. The space could also use a refresh with some basic cosmetic upgrades and wedding décor.

Therefore, staff recommend the following basic improvements to ensure the Petch House is a viable option for wedding services on a seasonal basis (April-October). These basic improvements would have no impact on the heritage features of the Petch House. With these proposed improvements and the type of use (seasonal use), the capacity of the Petch House could hold up to a maximum of 10 people. This structure's basic compliance with the Ontario Building Code has already been achieved and occupancy may be granted now with the recent replacement of its windows that open and close allowing for adequate air circulation for seasonal bookings.

Summary of the proposed upgrades and improvements:

- Cosmetic upgrades
- Addition of lighting
- Accessible ramp added to the entrance door
- Flooring system and covering
- Security system provisions
- Purchase of wedding décor

The cost estimate for these improvements would be approximately \$50,000. Based on current interest, staff recommend proceeding with the minimal upgrades.

In the future, if the demand continues to increase with a desire for year-round access or to support alternative uses (i.e. meeting space), a more significant renovation would be required. This would include the addition of electrical, HVAC and washrooms. This level

of renovation could cost approximately \$250,000 and would need to consider the impact on the heritage attributes of the building.

Advisory Committee Review

Heritage Advisory Committee November 2, 2020 (HAC20-012) and April 5, 2021 (Memo). The Committee expressed questions and concerns about a variety of things including parking capacity, occupant load, washroom facilities, accessibility, seasonal requirements, interior finishes, and the potential impact on any installation on the heritage attributes of the building. No impacts to any heritage attributes are anticipated as part of the proposed conversion. The Heritage Advisory Committee will also continue to be consulted with on detailed design matters moving forward.

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 capital 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 to the Recommendation

1. The Council refuse the conversion of the Petch House to a wedding chapel and direct staff to explore alternative options for the use of the building.

Conclusions

In order to convert the Petch House to a wedding chapel use seasonally, staff would recommend minimal improvements to make the Petch House viable for small civil wedding ceremonies. Town of Aurora already offers wedding services such as marriage licenses and civil ceremony officiating. Improving the Petch House, will put a currently unused facility into use and provide a nice alternative to the wedding services.

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

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

Pre-submission Review

Agenda Management Team review on February 1, 2024

Approvals

Approved by Robin McDougall, Director, Community Services

Approved by Doug Nadorozny, Chief Administrative Officer