

## Aurora, Historical Society to begin talks on Hillary House's future

It's a landmark that has been held up as one of the country's best examples of Victorian Gothic architecture, and now the future of Hillary House National Historic Site is the subject of talks between the Aurora Historical Society and the Town of Aurora.

As The Auroran reported last week, the Aurora Historical Society (AHS), which owns the Town's only National Historic Site, is seeking support from the Town to ensure the long-term sustainability of the house and property, which has stood on Yonge Street, just north of Irwin, for more than 160 years.

Currently a historic house museum and home to the Koffler Museum of Medicine in a nod to its heritage as one of Aurora's first medical practices, the AHS has struggled to raise funds to maintain the building in recent years.

Those concerns were voiced to Council last week by AHS co-president, and former Aurora mayor, Geoff Dawe.

"Hillary House is an asset of the Aurora Historical Society and has been maintained by the Society since its acquisition in 1981. However, the challenges of maintaining the building have been increasing as it ages [and] is exacerbated by increasing difficulties in raising necessary funds," said Dawe, noting that the latest repair assessment for Hillary House has clocked in at approximately \$1.2 million.

"Our financial position, which has been reported to Council over the last number of years" is well-known to Council."

Options for partnerships and support with the Town will help "maintain that gem of Aurora we call Hillary House."

"We appreciate and respect everything that the AHS has done for Hillary House and the community, and protecting and preserving our heritage," said Mayor Tom Mrakas. "We thank you guys, all. I think we're all eagerly looking forward" to seeing how this unfolds and how we can ensure that the Hillary House is something that our Town and future generations can look forward to seeing for another 150 years."

How this unfolds will be determined in future weeks.

According to Robin McDougall, Aurora's Director of Community Services, the first step will be to meet with the AHS Board and Executive to hear what their vision is ahead of beginning a public consultation process, whether that is held by the AHS or the Town.

Also to be considered, she said, is economic development potential.

"I am certainly supportive of the motion itself," said Ward 4 Councillor Michael Thompson on getting discussions underway. "I think that an important aspect of it is to engage the various stakeholders, residents, and having these open and honest dialogues and conversations with regards to the long-term viability of Hillary House and making a decision so we can all move forward."

Added Ward 1 Councillor Ron Weese: "I really hope that in this consultation we are going to focus on the value of our heritage in this community because we have a very unique community that has a lot of heritage to it, a very strong history, and I think it is marketable. I hope that is one of the questions that we're going to be asking in community consultations. It's really important that we look at heritage and value it. I also am very hopeful that we can find a way to continue to work with the Historical Society" which has done an awful lot of work for us for a very long time and a committed group of volunteers that have a lot of expertise. I really hope that we can work on something to work with the AHS because they have been great cultural partners over these last number of years."

**By Brock Weir**