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Aurora's Community Newspaper

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With warmer temperatures, hefty doses of sunlight, and setting the clocks forward an hour this weekend, Spring is just around the corner and Aurora residents are making the most of it. Here, Kaivai, Madara and Maija go for a stroll through Sheppard's Bush Conservation Area on Sunday morning.

Auroran photo by Glenn Rodger

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Vaccinations back on track after midweek snag left seniors in the cold

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Jessie Paquette dressed extra warmly on Friday morning. Donning two pairs of jeans, a toque, and wrapping a heavy scarf around her neck, the 90-year-old Aurora resident wasn't taking any chances on her way to Newmarket's Ray Twinney Complex to receive her first dose of the Pfizer

vaccine. She saw the pictures on her iPad the previous day, images of seniors standing in line outside the Complex in the blistering cold waiting for their turn. But, in her mind, the pros outweighed the cons and she was determined to get in line. She was not alone. Nor was she alone in having questions, questions which staff from Southlake Regional Health Centre and the Town of Newmarket

worked to rectify. In a statement issued on Thursday, Southlake said it "apologized" for the long line and said earlier in the day they experienced "some system and process issues" that resulted in the delays. Following Southlake's statement, Newmarket Mayor John Taylor issued an apology of his own to those who were impacted by the snag. "We should never allow our seniors to

Continued on page 6

COLD CASE – Aurora native Mike Mildon and comedy partner Jackson Rowe are big fans of true crime stories, but are now in the heart of the story. Taking on the cold case of Mike's great-great uncle Harold Heaven, who disappeared from his Minden cabin in 1934, the duo's sleuthing now forms the basis of the CBC Gem series "For Heaven's Sake." For more, see Page 3.

Photo courtesy of CBC

School Board tackles racism in new strategy

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

After years of identified inequities within the system, the York Region District School Board is tackling racism and anti-Black racism with a new strategy creating Black-affirming learning and working environments. The Board (YRDSB) released the plan on Monday evening acknowledging there have been

Continued on page 12

Hello Spring. Hello Colour.

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Sports Dome to come under control of the Town

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

The Aurora Sports Dome, a soccer staple on Industrial Parkway North, is soon set to come under control of the Town.

In a statement released by the Town on March 3, it was confirmed that while the final details have not yet been finalized, a deal is expected by the end of the month.

“While the closing details are still being finalized, the Town expects to take ownership of the facility on March 31, 2021,” said the Town. “At that time, the Town will also assume operations for the facility. Effective April 1, the Town will be responsible for booking the Dome, in accordance with our field allocation policy.”

Further information on how the Dome will operate under the municipal umbrella will be announced once the deal is closed. Since its inception, the Aurora Sports Dome has been a privately owned organization headed by Terry Redvers, whose group also operates the Marilyn Redvers Tennis Centre just behind the Stronach Aurora Recreation Complex.

Under private ownership, select hours have been set aside for municipal programs.

“The purchase, when final, will represent great value for the Town and our residents,” said Mayor Tom Mrakas in a statement. “I believe that under the Town’s ownership, we can all work together to make this a community-led facility.”

Mayor Mrakas went on to state that he did not believe the previous

agreements with Dome owners served the community well.

“During my campaign, I promised to work towards purchasing the Aurora Sports Dome,” he said. “I felt the lease, which had been in place for 15 years, did not serve our community well – and that if the Town owned the Dome outright, we could deliver better value and a higher level of service. I look forward to working with all sports organizations in the community to enhance our programming in this new Town-owned facility.”

Also enthusiastic over the plan was Councillor John Gallo. Although he said he would have more to say on the deal once all the details are finalized, he said this was a move in the right direction.

“I think generally it is a very good deal for the Town. That I can say, and I supported it,” he said. “I think once the

details are out, I can explain why. It has to do with the financial aspects of it and that is why I agreed with it.

“I think it is a better [deal] simply because there is no third party involved, much the same way as if someone else had owned the SARC and we’re using ice time through a third party. This is the Town that will, for the most part, be running this and owning it.”

When asked what he would deem his measures of success of this facility acquisition, he said it came down to dollars and cents.

“I think, probably, ultimately better value for the user groups because it is not a third-party for-profit organization that is determining the cost of use. It is the Town of Aurora and I believe there will be better value for the user groups. Generally speaking, it is a very good deal for the Town.”



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Northern Lights students expected to return to class Monday following COVID exposure

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Students at Northern Lights Public School are expected to return to class on Monday after the school was closed due to a COVID-19 exposure.

Northern Lights on Bridgenorth Drive was closed to students on Friday after the school faced the impact of a “COVID-19 exposure that has resulted in the dismissal of affected cohorts and staff.”

“Due to self-isolation requirements mandated by Public Health and resulting challenges in obtaining replacement coverage, Northern Lights will be closed to students from March 5 – March 12 inclusive,” said Principal Matthew Biemiller and

Vice Principal Jodi Fine in a letter to the school community. Students will return to in-person learning, physically at the school, on March 15.

“This closure is being implemented out of an abundance of caution and to ensure continuity of learning during this period. Once again, it is important to emphasize that this closure is a result of staff coverage and not a public health direction based on COVID-19 case counts at the school. If you have not received direct and specific communication from Public Health, there is no additional action for you to take. Families and students of classes that have not previously been excluded, do not need to start to self isolate at this time. The health and safety of

our students, staff and families is our priority.

“During this time, learning will continue virtually. Your child’s teacher will be in touch with students regarding arrangements for their virtual classroom. If your child requires access to a technology device or internet connection to participate in online learning, please contact the school via email at northern.lights.ps@yrdsb.ca. Tips and resources are available on the Board website to support families in accessing online learning tools.

“We recognize this information may be concerning for families. Please know this was a difficult decision and was made to ensure continuation of student learning and to support student safety and well-being.”

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Across from Southlake Regional Health Centre

Aurora native turns amateur sleuth to shine light on family's cold case



Mike Mildon and Jackson Rowe are pictured hard at work trying to crack a nearly-90-year-old cold case. Photo courtesy of CBC

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Harold Heaven was always an evocative, yet shadowy person in the life of Mike Mildon.

A native of Aurora, Mildon often heard Harold's name around the campfire, but the more he heard over the years, the more questions he had on just what became of his great-great uncle.

In October of 1934, Harold, then in his early thirties, went missing from his cabin near Minden. A land prospector by trade and someone who is now described in hindsight as a loner, left his cabin with the lamps still burning, the laundry still soaking, without locking the door – and disappeared without a trace.

His whereabouts, or what ultimately happened to him, was never satisfactorily solved and has remained a cold case for nearly 90 years. But, in recent years, Mildon, a filmmaker and comedian, and his comedy partner Jackson Rowe, decided to pick up their cameras and do a little sleuthing themselves.

The result is *For Heaven's Sake*, a true crime web series now streaming on CBC Gem that blends the true crime format with investigation and a splash of comedy.

"For my entire life, it has just been this campfire story," says Mildon. "Everyone knows the Harold story in the family; it's an embellished version and everyone had their own details to it, but I found there's a huge disconnection there. Until I got a hold of the actual police reports, which was around 2018, there was a face to the name. He was a real person, but I found this was a real case with a lot of investigative holes."

But, where do you start after a trail ran cold more than 80 years ago? Starting with the resources you have. Within the police report was a letter from Mildon's grandfather, Boyd, outlining why suicide didn't make sense as a possible fate for Harold. The letter pointed to different evidence that lead to people who, although they might not

have known Harold themselves, had a fighting chance of hearing first-hand stories from previous generations.

"When I read the police reports, I really did see some investigative holes and things that I would do differently," says Mike, who describes himself as an amateur investigator. "Not only that, but it was almost like we had one more generation that could have heard something, like a kernel of truth. My grandfather is only one generation removed from Harold so time, in a weird way, was of the essence even though it is almost 100 years later."

"The same with Minden, we were about to lose a story to time. I found it really interesting that the same way our family passed on the campfire story and the story of Harold, I thought there might have been someone in the Town who was passing down a different version. Maybe it was the truth or some lead they had they didn't know was important to us. A lot of that happened in the series."

Throughout the production of the eight-part series, Mike and Jackson set out not just to put their amateur sleuthing skills to the test but have fun with the final product as well. They are, says Mike, proud of the tone they set, as well as proving themselves to those who had doubts.

"A lot of people just had no hope in us, that we were jokesters and not going to get anywhere – but we do get somewhere. We get a lot farther than I think people thought we would. One of the cool things, personally, was that Harold was always the guy that just disappeared in my family and I think one of the great things about the series is we take a deep dive and try to get to know Harold himself better, who he was at the time. True crime has a lot of tropes. It is always focused on the murder and the evidence, but we take our time to also focus on the person himself."

So, who was Harold? At the time of his disappearance, he bought a piece of land and was planning to sell it off as property to cottagers. He loved nature and being up north far more

than he did living in Hamilton, where he experienced not insignificant family pressures.

He was meticulous and detail-oriented in his work. Did his work get in the way of a highway development? Did that have anything to do with his disappearance? You can only watch to find out.

"This follows the journey of Jackson and I on our amateur investigations and the lessons we learned along the way," says Mike. "We do get really far into the mystery and discover some pretty cool things, as well, we kind of learn the dos and don'ts of bringing up the past in a small town and trying to get everyone interested in this topic."

All eight episodes of *For Heaven's Sake* are streaming for free on the CBC Gem app.

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Auroralicious To Go gives patrons an opportunity to Savour The Flavours of Aurora by purchasing from the prix fixe (fixed price) program that many local restaurants are participating in. With so many fantastic restaurants and diverse cuisines in Aurora to choose from the only challenge will be in deciding which establishments to order from. Based on the Provincial Guidelines during the timing of Auroralicious To Go, some restaurants may offer dine-in as well as take-out.

For more information on this initiative or for interested restaurants that would like to participate, please email auroraliciousON@gmail.com. For a current list of participating restaurants and their available menus, please visit exploreaurora.ca.

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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Women “Choose to Challenge”

The theme for this year’s International Women’s Day is “Choose to Challenge”. As the organizers write “A challenged world is an alert world. Individually, we’re all responsible for our own thoughts and actions - all day, every day.” This theme seems particularly appropriate in a year when we have all been challenged in ways that we could not have imagined a year ago. COVID-19 has forced us all to look at the many societal issues that have long simmered under the surface of our busy lives.

Across Canada, the law and our Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms provide for equal rights, irrespective of gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and beliefs. But, equal rights do not automatically translate into equal opportunity, equal pay, or an equal voice.

Across the country, including here in York Region, the pandemic has shone a spotlight on a number of key issues that impact women disproportionately.

These include the need for affordable and available childcare and the need for fair pay and benefits. For women, who are the predominant caregivers to seniors or other family members in the home, this includes the provision of additional support. In addition, there must be standardization of training and working conditions for long term and home care staff. None of these issues is new, but the pandemic has forced us to recognize that not dealing with these issues has an enormous negative impact, both from a societal, and an economic perspective.

However, as is often noted, words are cheap, so what can we do to ensure that systematic change is implemented to ensure that we truly do, as the Prime Minister has committed, “Build Back Better”?

The federal government has been studying and planning for a full national daycare plan and its time has come. It has an advocate in Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland, who was quoted in her fiscal update last year as saying, “I say this both as a working mother and as a Minister of Finance: Canada will not be truly competitive until all Canadian women have access to the affordable childcare we need to support our participation in our country’s workforce.”

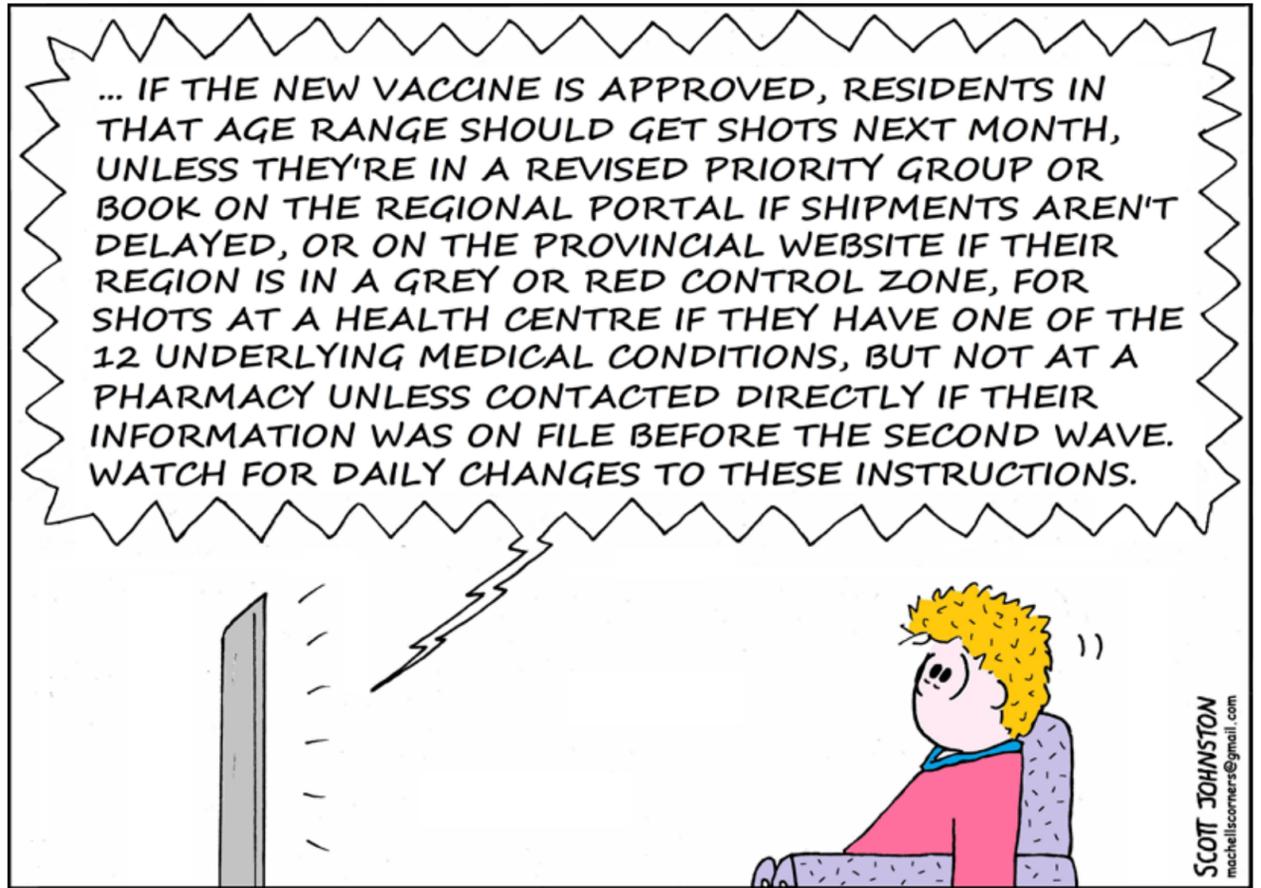
Calling it an element of a “feminist agenda”, Freeland added that spending the money makes “sound business sense”. Freeland has been among a group of female cabinet ministers who pushed childcare as a federal priority even before the pandemic. In combination with the continued increases in the Canada Child Benefit, which has lifted more than a million children out of poverty since its introduction in 2016, these programs will, we anticipate, go a long way toward addressing the need for universal, affordable child care.

Implementing programs that provide fair pay, benefits, training and standardization of working conditions for workers in long term and home care, will require a commitment from both the federal and provincial governments.

Planned national standards for these homes will help, and the federal government is working with provinces and territories to achieve this goal. We need to ensure that, going forward, our understanding of the heroic efforts made by long term care staff (nurses, PSWs, housekeeping, food services, etc.) during this pandemic, translates into a sustained commitment to ensure they receive what they need and deserve to ensure our seniors receive the care they so richly deserve. We need to make sure our voices are heard at all levels of government so that returning to the status quo for Long Term Care Homes, their staff and

Continued on page 14

Machell’s Corners



The lost art of planning ahead

“You know what we should do this summer? We should —”

Well, what should we? I thought I knew how that sentence could be completed, but by the time the words started coming out of my mind, I trailed off. What was the point of finishing the thought? Sure, if you’re of a particular philosophical way of thinking, there’s some value in throwing these things “out into the universe” to see if they come back to you in some sort of tangible way, but you can only burn so much through exercises of futility.

It’s not my intention to sound like a “downer” but, if this pandemic has taught us anything, it’s that it never hurts to have a Plan B, C, D, or E, just in case something gets in the way of what you set out to do.

After invariably bleak Januarys and Februarys, March brings no small shot of hope along with it.

Spring is, of course, right around the corner. Birds are coming out of their doldrums to sing their sweet songs, daylight hours are getting longer, there’s a feeling that there are more hours in the day to accomplish whatever is on your to-do list, there’s a freshness in the air that has nothing to do with brisk temperatures. Despite your best efforts, all these factors can conspire to buoy you up to make some pretty ambitious goals.

What we now define as an ambitious goal has likely changed over the course of the past year, but however you define them, now is usually the time you start thinking ahead to seemingly endless possibilities.

As the sun blazed down on a cool Sunday morning this past weekend, it was hard not to get swept away by the what-ifs and what-could-bes. With the vaccine rollout ramping up once again, it felt like in just a few “short” months there would be a return to some semblance of normalcy and, thus, those aforementioned endless possibilities.

But it didn’t take long for reality to come back into the scene and rear its ugly head.

No matter what you have on your so-called vision board, putting a checkmark beside whatever it might be is now contingent on so many other factors: the continuing and smooth release of vaccinations, people continuing to do everything that is required of them to squash the curve, and, as trite as it might sound these days, keeping the simple fact that we are all still in this together uppermost in mind.

It was not all that long ago that planning ahead almost seemed like a chore. Now, as



BROCK’S BANTER

Brock Weir

this pandemic still rolls out, the ability to plan ahead feels like a simple pleasure we almost took for granted.

How nice it will be to plan a get-together with friends a week or two in advance. Or to plan an in-person birthday celebration for a loved one. To lay the groundwork for a trip out of Town, whether for a lengthy vacation or just an overnight respite away from the same four walls that have formed our world for the past 12 months. To make a shopping list without also having to consider a game plan to get in and out of your chosen store as quickly and efficiently as possible with a full arsenal of PPE to hand.

This longing for days where we had the luxury of planning ahead isn’t limited to the individual. Businesses are also feeling this challenge every day.

York Region is now going into the second full week of being back into the Red (Control) Zone of the Province’s re-opening plan and, despite a significant uptick in new cases of COVID-19 reported by the Province on Monday, these local numbers appear to be holding relatively steady, an encouraging sign.

In Peel Region, the week started out with a welcome return to some degree of “new normalcy” with stay-at-home orders lifted and the rest of the area, along with the City of Toronto, being lifted back into the Grey (Lockdown) Zone.

Simcoe-Muskoka, on the other hand, continues its trend towards change at a whiplash rate, lifted back into the Red Zone on Monday, the level in which they were placed in February 16 before the Province slammed the emergency break and threw the area back into the Grey on March 8, leaving everyone with the herculean task of adapting to and rolling with these incredibly complex and rapidly changing punches.

It is anyone’s guess how long the current levels in all three regions will hold, leaving residents and business owners alike forging ahead with what is currently required of

them while simultaneously holding their breath waiting for the next shoe to drop in this complex and patchwork response to the emergency we’re all so tired of.

Until we’re in the clear, we’re all in the same boat and that’s just the reality of it.

Despite these challenges, this week began with multiple observances as International Women’s Day converged with Commonwealth Day, a recognition of the unique relationships shared by more than 50 nations around the world. The latter is normally a day that passes with little fanfare, but given the fact this year’s commemorations would be virtual rather than in-person, interest was heightened as so many more people were able to take part.

It was also a welcome reminder that no matter how hard we’re fighting the fight at home, other nations in this “family” have had their own share of unique challenges and triumphs over a shared foe.

In her role as Head of the Commonwealth, the Queen released a message reflecting not only the experiences that have come to bind us together, but highlighting how these efforts are now allowing us to look to the future.

“The need to maintain greater physical distance, or to live and work largely in isolation, has...been an unusual experience,” she said. “In our everyday lives, we have had to become more accustomed to connecting and communicating via innovative technology – which has been new for some of us – with conversations and community gatherings... enabling people to stay in touch with friends, family, colleagues and counterparts, who they have not been able to meet in person.

“Increasingly, we have found ourselves able to enjoy such communication, as it offers an immediacy that transcends boundaries or division, helping any sense of distance to disappear. We have all continued to appreciate the support, breadth of experiences and knowledge that working together brings, and I hope we shall maintain this renewed sense of closeness and community.”

As the light at the end of the tunnel continues to grow, we look back with appreciation on these same tenets, recognizing that many of the solutions we have come up with to maintain what is required and necessary have indeed brought us closer together. It remains to be seen which innovations will stand the test of time as a new “new normal” approaches. With spring approaching, it never hurts to look ahead, but the ability to plan ahead? Now that’s a luxury.

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Deadline for submissions is Sunday at 1 p.m.



The Aurora Museum & Archives is feeling...

Locked up!

With the first year of the pandemic behind us, we can reflect on how some of us feel like prisoners in our own homes. We're lucky that there hasn't been a true jail cell lock keeping us here! Prison cell keys such as this intricate, oversized Folger-Adam (994.16.1) have been in continuous use for over a century. This example from our collection was used to lock the cells in the basement of the Aurora police headquarters in the 1960s when it was housed in the old 1888 Waterworks building on Yonge, south of Church Street.



Welcome to Library Land

By Reccia Mandelcorn

It is rare to read a book in which the author doesn't thank their editor. I always look for that acknowledgement much like a film buff will stay on to watch the end credits. Working in the shadow of the author, the role of a good editor is integral to the writing process; the relationship between author and editor built as a respectful collaboration of creatives.

A good editor not only corrects errors; they polish and refine, guiding the focus of the narrative much like the director of a film. They can be ruthless in cutting out the nonessential and helpful in drawing attention to places that require additional concentration. And a surprising number of award-winning books grab us with beginnings that were mere middle chapters in the original manuscript. Full disclosure: I am a self-confessed editor groupie.

Some years back, I studied publishing at Ryerson University. My favourite course was one on editing trade fiction taught by Greg Ioannou. I received an A+ for my efforts. Later, when my daughter went to work for Greg, and our familial relationship was eventually pieced together, he told her I was one of his best students. "Of course" she responded, "I edited all her assignments". The role of a good editor should never be underestimated.

Living in Library Land, my garden is abundant with narrative. And like any other gardener, I am always on the hunt for new stories; particularly those of species native to Canada. In thinking about how to support authors to best improve their writing; maybe to even to get that elusive book deal, I thought to create an Editor-in-Residence position at Aurora Public Library for 2021. The pitch was made; the project accepted.

Greg Ioannou has been named APL's first Editor-in-Residence for Spring 2021. Greg has been editing books since 1977 and is a founding member of the Editors' Association of Canada. He owns and runs Colborne Communications and is the president at Iguana Books. Over his career, Greg has edited more than 3,000 books, including writing by Margaret Atwood, Peter Gzowski, Robertson Davies, and (posthumously), Lester Pearson.

The Editor-in-Residence program will offer three workshops from April to June. Participants will learn about the standard sequence of editing steps, the advantages and disadvantages of traditional, self-publishing and hybrid models, and how to write that most important query letter that can make the difference between "slush pile" to serious consideration.

Library Land presents unknown terrain, including wonderful books yet to be discovered, nurtured and published. Information on the Editor-in-Residence series can be found at aurorapl.ca. Enrollment is limited.

What I've been reading:

The Push by Ashley Audrain

The Forgotten Daughter

by Joanna Goodman

Trust Your Eyes by Linwood Barclay

Five Little Indians by Michelle Good

Reccia Mandelcorn is the Manager, Community Collaboration at Aurora Public Library. The opinions expressed in this column reflect her personal thoughts about the engagement of community with their public library.

A Special Committee to Review Canada's relationship with the United States

A new President in the United States brings an opportunity for a renewed Canada-US relationship. However, it is unlikely that the US strategy will substantively shift. For some time, in response to changes in the global economic balance of power, the US has charted a course away from globalization, and placed a greater emphasis on national capability, self-sufficiency, and security. It is unlikely this approach will change under President Biden. Canada's economy and security is highly integrated with the US. Therefore, it is important to determine the impact this approach will have on Canada and this critical relationship as a whole. Canada must also explore if pursuing a similar approach would be in our nation's best interest.

Canada has experienced the changes in the US approach first hand. Punishing national security tariffs imposed by the US on steel and aluminum imports from Canada resulted in an economic hit to the Canadian steel and aluminum industry. Manufacturing jobs in those industries increased in the US as a result.

Changes to the US tax code have incentivized US companies through favourable tax conditions to move manufacturing jobs out of Canada back to the US. Furthermore, during the recent negotiation of the NAFTA agreement, the USMCA, we watched as the US moved away from "free" trade to "managed" trade. This resulted in the imposition of caps restricting the amount of certain goods that can be exported/imported before tariffs are triggered. This is intended to achieve a more equitable balance of trade and to protect US domestic capability. For Canada, it will reduce the amount that Canada's exports to the US can grow.

During COVID-19, the US



MP'S REPORT

Leona Alleslev, MP

Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill

government has taken one step further by invoking the Defence Production Act to ramp up domestic US Personal Protective Equipment, drugs, and vaccine manufacturing capacity, and restrict external US shipments to ensure their domestic population is addressed first. With highly integrated supply chains between Canada and the US, this has created cause for concern. Canadians are left wondering whether Canada's supply of these critical items is at risk.

Also facing challenges is our energy industry. President Biden upon assuming office immediately cancelled a key energy project, the Keystone XL pipeline. This decision will affect North American energy supply and thousands of Canadian jobs. Additionally, the Governor of Michigan is seeking to prevent oil and gas from transiting through the Line 5 pipeline under Lake Michigan. Enbridge's Line 5 affects thousands of Canadian jobs and is a critical energy supply for thousands of households in Ontario and Quebec. Suspension of portions of this pipeline would have a detrimental affect on Canada's economic and energy security.

Canadian exports to the US in infrastructure and construction services are also in jeopardy. President Biden signed a US executive order entitled

What's in a Name?



INSIDE AURORA

Scott Johnston

the library and museum. How about 'Bridge Square'?"

"We're trying to bring people back to the Promenade, and based on the Square's location, how about including the word Yonge?" suggested another one of the staffers, over the sound of a dog barking in the background. "Sorry", he said, before turning away from the screen and urging "quiet, Daisy!"

"In my mind, this is an area of arts, and cultural rebirth," said the lady above him on the screen. "We need to combine those thoughts." She stared off into space with a thoughtful look, and then said "I've got it; 'Renaissance Square.'"

"But it's not just a Centre for the arts, there's a whole educational component," argued someone else. "How about including the word 'Learning'?"

"Or 'Reference'?" chipped in the person beside him on the screen.

"Those two aren't bad."

"We have several good ideas. Why don't we give all of them to Council and they can choose?"

"No," said the man chairing the meeting. "Our mandate is to come up with one final recommendation."

"So, Council's tasked us with coming up for a new name for Library Square."

The Town staff selected from various departments to participate in this endeavor looked out from their boxes arrayed on the computer screen. Of course, as with most meetings held during the pandemic, it was being conducted online via Zoom.

"The current name doesn't adequately describe the space now under construction," the team lead continued. "The designation as a 'Square' is fine, but the focus will no longer be just a library. There's the Cultural Centre, Museum space, a performance hall, amphitheater, splash pad ..."

"There's lots of famous Aurorans we could honour," said one lady. "How about recognizing Ron Wallace?"

"I'm sure the Town will find something suitable to be named after him," responded the team lead, "but we've been directed not to identify the Square with any one person. What Council wants is something short, catchy, and that provides a recognizable link to the area and Town."

"Why not just call it 'Aurora Square'? Then we can all go home early."

The Town staff laughed at their colleague's joke, especially since most of them were working from home, already.

"Aurora' is one possibility, but any more original thoughts?"

"We could honour the Indigenous people who first settled this area," said a man on the left side of the screen.

"That's good."

"One of the central architectural features will be the new bridge between

"Buy America" which would exclude Canadian bidders from US Government infrastructure projects, impacting a significant portion of Canada's current revenue.

This direction by the US government is not an isolated incident but rather a trend. The "Roadmap" signed between Prime Minister Trudeau and President Biden outlines a commitment to modernize trade rules, including those related to procurement, to ensure that countries can use their own national taxpayer dollars to spur domestic investments. This, in other words, would exclude other countries from bidding on government domestic work.

Determining how to mitigate these potential negative impacts or to pivot and consider adopting similar national capability and self sufficiency initiatives must be an urgent focus of all Canada's political leaders.

Toward this end, the House of Commons approved a Conservative motion to establish a special committee on the economic relationship between Canada and the United States. This committee is responsible to examine and review all aspects of this critical partnership as well as to explore the economic rules, regulatory frameworks and the security concerns of both nations. I am pleased to serve on this committee.

With over \$1.5 billion per day in trade between Canada and the US, Canada cannot afford to be complacent. Canada must not assume that the conditions that have been in place for the last 20 years will remain unchanged. The US has signalled the areas they intend to change, in some cases, fundamentally. Canada must define our priorities and decide how we plan to respond. The future of our recovery, and our economic security and prosperity depends upon it.

"We'll just have to narrow it down," said one of the participants. "I say we get rid of 'Bridge'."

"Hey, that was my idea," said the staffer who suggested it. "That structure's going to be a visual focal point."

"Then drop 'Yonge'."

"But Aurora was built up along Yonge Street. It's the heart of the community."

More suggestions came forward of words that could be eliminated, but each was strongly supported for one reason or another. The chair quickly realized that cutting down the list would not be so easy a task.

Just when he thought they'd reached an impasse, one of his colleagues had a eureka moment.

"I've got it," she said with enthusiasm. "The Square won't represent just one feature, but all of these things we've discussed. So how about an acronym?"

"You mean just take the first letter of each word?" asked the team lead. "That's brilliant. That way we can use them all. What do you think?"

When everyone online agreed that it was a logical idea, he concluded, "Great work, everyone. I'll compile our notes and pass along our recommendation to Council."

And that's how on a fine spring day in 2021, Council formally approved changing Library Square's name to Learning-Indigenous-Bridge-Renaissance-Aurora-Reference-Yonge Square, or simply, "L.I.B.R.A.R.Y Square".

Feel free to e-mail Scott at: machellscorners@gmail.com

THIS WEEK'S NEW POLL

Should Aurora consider a new name for Library Square?

Yes No Unsure

www.theauroran.com

PREVIOUS POLL

Will you be participating in AURORALICIOUS?

RESULTS TO DATE	YES	NO	UNSURE
March 9, 2021	50%	38%	12%

Vaccinations for 80+ continue at Regional clinics

From page 1

wait like that in the cold with nowhere to sit," he said in a statement posted to social media. "To be honest, I was heartbroken to see it. We sent over 12 staff and in about a half hour we had a numbering system in place, everyone inside and in chairs. Southlake CEO Arden Krystal has explained to me that the COVAX booking system went down/slowed down and created the backlog, amongst other issues. Having said that, a call for assistance should have been issued immediately

and people should have been given information and moved inside. In fact, they should and will be inside from now on. I assure you there will be lessons learned."

These lessons learned were shared Friday with The Auroran by Dr. Gayle Seddon, Executive Lead on Vaccinations at Southlake.

"The team last night spent a lot of time looking at exactly what happened yesterday," she said. "We partnered with the Town of Newmarket and that is helping us ensure that people arrive



Seniors arrive at the vaccination clinic at Newmarket's Ray Twinney Complex on Friday morning, following significant backlog the day before.

Auroran photo by Brock Weir

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ten minutes before their scheduled time. Sometimes people arrive an hour or so, maybe more, and believe that they should get into the clinic and that is really not what should happen with a mass vaccination clinic. Our partners with the Town of Newmarket meet people in their cars, confirm the time of their appointment, and then they also...check to make sure they're coming into the Centre about 10 minutes before their appointment. Making sure that people get into the vaccination centre at their scheduled time is one of our big learnings from yesterday.

"We are very sorry for the experiences people had yesterday. What we want them to know is all of the feedback people gave us, we debriefed through all of that last evening and put plans in place to address the concerns people had. They gave us feedback, we listened, we put it into our system, into our plans last night and we addressed it."

Arriving just a few hours later, Ms. Paquette had a very different experience than her friends who were in line the day before.

"I was very afraid there were going to be big lineups," says Ms. Paquette, who lives in the community with her daughter and son-in-law. "But we drove in, went inside, sat down and we were called. I got my shot and then we had to wait 15 minutes before we left and could come home. I was very impressed."

Since the start of the pandemic, Ms. Paquette has done what she could to help the cause. An avid knitter, she crafted mask extenders for frontline workers, including those at Southlake, which allowed face masks to be fixed behind the head rather than looped around the ears, a method that is

far removed from comfortable after wearing the necessary coverings for hours at a time.

She didn't hesitate to get the Polio vaccine when it was first developed, and she's not about to embrace vaccine hesitancy any time soon.

"I think it is important that people realize that we have a pandemic and in order to get through it and get through it successfully we have to look back on what happened when they had the Polio vaccine and everybody went and got it," she says. "I think people realize that they have to have to get the shot. If you haven't heard people talking about adverse reactions to it, why wouldn't you go out? All of my friends have gone and got it; it is there, it is being offered as a public service and they have organized it extremely well for people."

"I am not sure if I'm looking forward to the second shot, but I am going to get it! My son-in-law is American and his wife, my daughter, is a Canadian and they have a son living in Texas who had their first baby and they can't even get down to see them. You have to look at the circumstances. We must do things in order to curtail it coming back and having another wave. I am looking forward to being able to get out - I am tired of being in the house!"

As of Tuesday, March 9, Aurora has seen a total of 980 cases of COVID-19, 32 of which remain active. There have been 908 recoveries and 40 fatalities attributed to the virus. Of the active cases, 29 are attributed to close contact or local transmission and 3 to workplace cluster.

For more information on York Region's vaccination efforts, and to book your appointment when the time comes for your age group or personal circumstance, visit York.ca/covid19vaccination.

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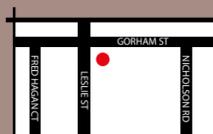


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Philanthropy and small business help Aurora student land prestigious scholarship



Aurora resident Avery Benlolo is off to Queen's University this fall after earning a prestigious scholarship for her philanthropic and business work. **Photo by CDS**

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

For the last seven years, Avery Benlolo has devoted her spare time to making a difference in the lives of local women in need.

Together with her sisters Lexi and Amanda, they founded the Pampered Pillowcase, an organization delivering items to brighten the lives of these women, regardless of their circumstances. In just a few short years, the Pampered Pillowcase program has mushroomed from their Aurora basement to chapters across North America. Now, their efforts have reaped some unexpected dividends: earning Avery a place among just 50 students nation-wide receiving the Chancellor's Scholarship from Queen's University.

Nominations for the Queen's University Chancellor's Scholarship are open to many Canadian high schools and the number of nominees each place of learning is allowed to submit is determined by the size of the school itself. As a student at an independent

school, Avery was the sole nominee this year from King's Country Day School.

"Once you're nominated, there's a really long application process that included a few different essays, your transcript, a reference letter, and a creative component," says Avery. "I didn't hear back for a few months, but I was anxiously waiting."

At the same time as she applied for the scholarship, Avery applied to Queen's Commerce program and, within the span of a week, she found out she was twice lucky.

"I was celebrating with the whole family that I got into the program I wanted to get into and then later I got another email that I had won the scholarship and it put me and my entire family over the moon," she says.

During the application process, Avery highlighted the work she, Lexi and Amanda carried out to make the Pampered Pillowcase the success it continues to be. In addition, when prompted to write an essay demonstrating her leadership ability, she had the perfect point of reference: Sweet Scrubs N' Stuff, a small business she launched selling naturally sourced bath products at the Aurora Farmers' Market.

"I was able to talk about how this gave me a big sense of independence, how I learned to be responsible and work on my own, and how I would sometimes face issues out there on my own," she says. "We had a lot of opportunities growing up and we have always known how important it is to give back."

"When we started the Pampered Pillowcase, it was just our chapter in York Region not doing a crazy amount of pillow cases each year, but it was really nice to give back in a unique way with some products for women who are struggling and not in as good a circumstance as we are feel pampered, remembered and special. When we started it, it was a really amazing feeling

and now we're looking at where we have grown all across North America with almost a dozen chapters. It is great to see the impact we've had and how many young girls around North America are having that same feeling as us, being so happy they were able to make a difference."

When Avery heads to Kingston this year to take up her program at Queen's, she will be among family.

Both of her sisters currently attend Queens, where Lexi was also a recipient of the Chancellor's Scholarship. Together, they have looked at ways to continue giving back in their new community, particularly to give a helping hand to women.

"I think all these things I have been doing and all these smaller-scale businesses that I have been a part of are kind of building up and hopefully

one day they will allow me to create something really great," says Avery. "In this moment and throughout my career, I am still young and I want to be able to learn as much as I can to develop as many skills as I can to one day hopefully run a business and be a great entrepreneur."

"My whole family – sisters and parents – have been so supportive through everything. They're so ecstatic that we have been able to get these great achievements and we're all going to be in the same place. A lot of the things I have been able to accomplish in getting into Queen's and getting this scholarship I don't think would have been possible without some of the incredible teachers I've had and all the support from my family. They are always there to be behind me and support me through anything."



COMMUNITY NOTICE ANNUAL VEGETATION MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

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The program is expected to take place from April to October 2021. Visit www.cn.ca/vegetation to see the list of cities as well as the updated schedule.

For more information, contact the CN Public Inquiry Line at contact@cn.ca or 1-888-888-5909.

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Average homeowners to save \$56 on 2021 water bills

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

A Regional reduction in the cost of wholesale water will have a trickle-down effect on residential water bills in Aurora.

This month, Council is poised to reduce the water rates as approved in the 2021 Budget following a decision by the Region of York to delay a planned increase in the wholesale cost of water supplying the nine municipalities under its umbrella.

At the approval of Aurora's 2021 Budget, Council approved a cost of \$2.34 per cubic metre of water, up from \$2.18 the year before. The decision by the Region, however, will bring this number back down to \$2.18, resulting in a savings of \$56.16 over twelve months beginning

May 1.

"Water, wastewater and storm water budgets are fully funded through the rates charged to residents and businesses," said Laura Sheardown, Financial Management Advisor, in a report to Council presented at last week's General Committee meeting. "The 2021 to 2022 Budget assumed an increase in the cost for purchased water and wastewater from York Region at a rate of 2.9 per cent with the caveat that should the Region reduce their rates to the Town then the rates included in the Budget for water and wastewater would be revised to reflect those savings.

"On December 10, Regional Council decided not to increase their rates charged to local municipalities including Aurora."

Residents, said Councillor Wendy Gaertner, "are going to be very happy

with this policy" but she questioned the long-term impacts of not raising the cost of water at this time – including ongoing maintenance costs.

"This 2.9 might somehow come back to us over a number of years or in another year," she said.

"It is definitely going to come back," replied Mayor Tom Mrakas. "I have to be honest: the Region just punted the football down the field and it is going to come back."

But, for residents who are struggling now due to the global pandemic, "this is a good news story" right now, said Councillor Gaertner.

Similar sentiments were offered by Councillor Harold Kim who said this was "good news in the short term."

"If we put our property taxes at zero, we know that we still have to play catch-up and charge any potential increase that we forewent this year and the subsequent year," he said. "In our conversation earlier in the day... The Mayor said the Region is punting it, but are they really going to punt it, or is it a matter of York Region's infrastructure is more youthful than other Regions and therefore there's a little bit more flexibility?"

"The last time the Region did their water/wastewater master plan was in 2016 and I believe they are scheduled to update that this year. With their Master Plan being updated this year, it affords them a little more duration flexibility. Is that the reason? Could that be a pro-reason that rates will not double next year and we do have a consistency next year as well in terms of 2.9 or thereabouts?"

Town Treasurer and Director of Finance Rachel Wainwright van Kessel noted that the revised water rates fully funds what is in the budget thus far, but the Town has not completed a long-term asset management forecast for the long-term impacts and needs.

"That will come forward as part of the fiscal strategy we started doing longer-term analysis, particularly for asset management," she said. "Then we will understand if we're on a full cost recovery basis for asset management. The Region did do that in their 2015 Water Rate study that they brought forward and that is why they have recommended the rates that they have included for the following six years, which includes nine per cent increases up to 2020 and a 2.9 per cent increase in 2021."

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Getting Things Done

Mayor Tom Mrakas

Last week, General Committee considered the Museum Plan 2021 – 2025, which outlines the vision for preserving, promoting and protecting our heritage in the next few years.

To quote the report, "This plan builds a framework for us, as a Town, to increase access to the existing collection, to maintain and develop the collection in accordance with accepted museum standards and practice, to connect with local residents and community groups to build capacity and ultimately connect, engage and inspire our community."

Our past has always been an important part of the Aurora community, as it informs our future; our history plays a big part in who we are as a community. Preserving, protecting and promoting our heritage is an important part of how we grow as a Town because "we need to know where we came from to get where we are going."

I don't believe you can put a price on our history, because it is priceless! Once it is gone, it is gone forever. That doesn't mean we should not take budgetary concerns into the consideration lens when considering heritage matters, however, I don't believe a financial lens is the only consideration when making decisions.

As a Council our job is to look at all aspects of a decision; examine how every tax dollar spent brings value to our residents. When it comes to our heritage, I believe it has immense value!

The recommendation at General Committee "That the Museum Plan 2021-2025 be endorsed in principle, subject to Council approval of budgetary implications" passed at GC and will now move to Council for ratification.

I look forward to seeing our Aurora Museum and Archives flourish within a plan that sets out a clear vision on how we preserve, protect and promote our heritage so that future generations will enjoy and learn from our past.

That's all for this week. As always, if you would like to get into contact with me please feel free to do so anytime by phone 905-727-3123 ext. 4746 or by email tmrakas@aurora.ca and if you would like to sign up for more newsletters and Council updates, please let me know and I will add you to the growing list of Aurorans that are staying informed.

(Editor's Note: for more on the Museum Plan, see Page 10)

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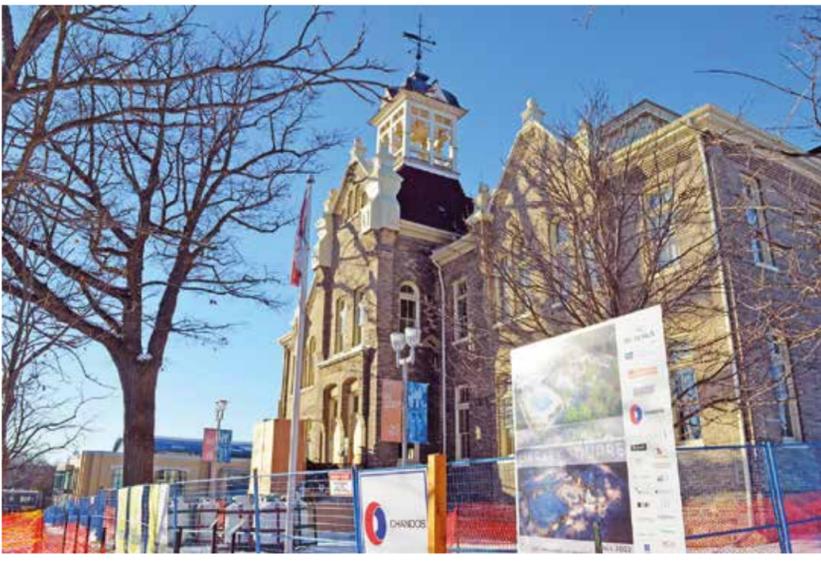
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Name changed mulled for Library Square redevelopment



As work continues on constructing Library Square, Council is set to consider a new official name for the site. **Auroran photo by Brock Weir**

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

The Aurora Public Library might be one anchor point of the upcoming redevelopment of Library Square, but it is about much more than just the library, according to Town Staff, and its name needs to reflect that reality.

Although ideas for the space have been known as “Library Square” for nearly 30 years, that name could soon be a part of history in favour of a new name yet to be determined.

This spring, staff will provide Council with a recommended name – and one alternative option – for Library Square, following online engagement with residents as well as community partners.

Despite a number of recommendations coming forward, however, a consensus on a name which would be easily identified and suitable for marketing has not yet been reached.

“Given the property’s historic ties to the Library, it was fitting to use Library

Square to identify this property,” said Library Square Project Manager Phil Rose Donahoe in a report to Council. “Since 2001, the present-day Library has formed the west side of the property. Library Square continues to be used to describe this parcel of land, as well as the capital construction project currently underway, which includes... a 32,000 square foot addition to the Church Street School that features performance space, visual arts studios, museum storage, multi-purpose dance studio, program rooms, café and a catering kitchen.

“While the Aurora Public Library remains a key stakeholder, the project has evolved in such a way that the name ‘Library Square’ no longer captures the full extent of its cross-sectoral and collaborative nature. Therefore, staff recommend that a new name be chosen to identify the property that encompasses the Library, 22 Church Street (Aurora Museum & Archives and Aurora Cultural Centre), including the new addition, the sky bridge, and outdoor square.”

The Town began soliciting the public for feedback on alternative names in 2018 and a variety of suggestions have come forward reflecting “historical figures that people felt were vital to the growth of the Town and the nation, including the founding Machell and Doan families, Queen Victoria, and former Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson who attended the Church Street School.

“Even though the Town recognizes the need to honour the neighbourhood’s heritage, it is also important that the name selected for the new space speaks to Aurora’s contemporary status as a progressive and diversifying municipality,” said Mr. Rose-Donahoe. “Ultimately, the staff committee tasked with reviewing the proposed names were unable to reach a consensus on any one name.”

While it is still unclear whether Council will have any more luck coming up with a consensus, the report notes that talks with Mayor and Council yielded a few points that will help inform the names that are ultimately put forward: cultural context of the place, Aurora in the final name, and a name that “should convey the new space will be home to arts and culture activities, but will also be a family-friendly community complex that is vital to economic development and downtown revitalization.”

Presenting his report to Council at the Committee level last week, Mr. Rose-Donahoe cited Mississauga’s Celebration Square as an example.

There, Councillor Michael Thompson questioned how, when the name is settled, the Library Square team plans to “sell and market Library Square, and for what purpose.”

“We’re at the point of finalizing the award of contract for the fundraising consultant,” replied Mr. Rose-Donahoe. “We went through the process at the end of the year

and we’re just in the final stages of awarding that contract. The details will be figured out in consultation with our consultant as well as our internal staff. One of the things we originally thought was we would have one name for the entire project that would be protected, that we would hold onto as a municipality, something that would remain in perpetuity... In consultation with some of the consultants [we interviewed] we didn’t necessarily want to leave money on the table, so to speak, and that was the advice we got back. We want to consider everything.

“We don’t want to have every nook and cranny of the facility sold off for naming rights or sponsorship, but we’re mindful of that, but we still want to explore what we can name and what we can leverage for fundraising purposes, with the idea we want to raise approximately \$5 million through this process.”

But Councillor Thompson said he was “not sold” on the idea of creating a brand for Library Square that could then be put on “coffee cups and t-shirts” as a marketing tool.

“We’re in the customer service business. We serve residents and this is their space. I want to be cautious about renting it out or using it for sales and marketing.”

As for marketing and fundraising, Councillor Rachel Gilliland questioned whether staff had agreed on an actual model going forward.

“I was under the impression that we would have an opportunity to see what those options were based on the last presentation we did have in Closed Session, she said. “It would be nice to see what other opportunities might have been out there just to kind of help make that decision for Library Square’s campaign. I am not going to say that I know what all those models look like [but] it would have been nice to have that assessment.”

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Museum charts course for next four years with new home in mind

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Museums often look backward, but the Aurora Museum & Archives is very much focused on the future.

Last week, curator Shawna White presented to Council the museum's plan through 2025, one which will see them grow physically within its new home within the Library Square complex as well as expand its reach through the community as a whole.

"Many people believe my role is confined to the past, the history of the community, but one must acknowledge that yesterday is history and to be truly robust and relevant means that I must be aware of what is happening in the community in order to preserve, promote and present the vibrancy and change as it happens," said Ms. White.

The multi-year plan as presented looks at four key factors that will define change as it happens: access, collections management and conservation, partnerships, and programs and outreach. The plan contains 15 strategies and 50 action items through to the middle of the decade.

The ultimate goal of this first pillar is to increase the community's access to the collection.

Since the temporary closure last year of the Church Street School for the duration of Library Square's construction, Town Hall has been the Museum's nerve centre. Although the building is unable to open to the general public due to ongoing restrictions related to the global pandemic, increasing access

to the collection is already underway within those red brick walls on John West Way.

Last year, the Museum transformed a wall outside Council Chambers into a mural exhibition on the Queen's York Rangers, and plans are now afoot to translate their previous exhibition, The Wardrobes of Aurora, into a mural and artefact space on Town Hall's second floor showcasing textiles, shoes and other items from Aurora's closets that now reside within their collection.

Collections and Management will be a "vital" area going forward as the Museum looks towards its new digs at Library Square. Once complete, Ms. White says the archives will be housed in a new facility with a glass wall that will allow visitors not only to see the archives themselves, but conservation efforts in action.

As these efforts continue, partnerships between the Museum and community organizations are set for an expansion. These partnership efforts came into sharp focus in February for Black History Month as the Museum collaborated with members of the Aurora Black Community Facebook group for a series of virtual commemorations. This will continue with their planned new exhibition, Journey to the Crossroads, which looks at immigration from its earliest days through to the 2000s.

Ms. White's plan was received warmly by Council, but it did not come without question.

Councillor Michael Thompson, for instance, focused in on the Museum's proposed budget through the next five years, including plans



AURORA

MUSEUM & ARCHIVES

to bring on an additional staff person in 2022 to expand education, programming and outreach. As such, he asked when the Museum plans to grow revenue.

In response, Ms. White says they currently are unable to do school programming due to space and staffing issues, and they presently "have no baseline" on revenues.

"I don't want to pull figures out of the air based on nothing," she said. "There will be corresponding revenue and that will be our only revenue line. The Museum is a service that is provided, much like the Library. There is no cost to residents to come in and see, but there will be costs for formal programming. The position is to bring that programmer in to develop the programs."

But the Councillor contended it "is not a bad thing" to look at revenue projections over a five-year horizon.

"I get it, it's a shot in the dark, but it is always good to have targets," said Councillor Thompson. "I think if we have a number there it gives us a goal to reach at. I hear you when you say it is a service [like] the Library, but when I sat on the Library Board, I still challenged the Library Board to grow revenue, even if it was just incremental in any which way because, at the end of the day, revenue you're able to generate means it is less of a requisition from the taxpayers."

He also asked the Museum for key performance indicators (KPIs) over the next five years to "gauge the effectiveness or success" of what the Museum is trying to achieve.

"KPIs, to me, are so broadly worded and I am not sure I necessarily agree with just broadly

using that word," said Ms. White. "I would rather come up with specific actions and plans that are measurable, that you can look back: did we do what we said we were going to do rather than coming up with increased attendance by X amount or whatever because I can't measure that. We don't have ticket sales, we don't have a counter that comes in. It is open. I have to measure by my actions and by what we do as a museum. I can take a stab at KPIs, but I think it is much more productive to judge me and the museum by these action items...how much we realized and how we did what we said we were going to do."

Councillor Thompson's sentiments, however, were shared by Councillor John Gallo who said that while the "museum has certainly gone a long, long way" it was "hard to grasp the return on investment."

"It is hard to grasp the return on investment on these types of things because they are cultural in value and the value to the community is very hard to pinpoint to a dollar," he said.

Added Mayor Tom Mrakas: "I think every single person around this table looks at how we can make sure we're providing the best possible services and the best possible price. We're always looking at what we can do to save taxpayers any money, but I think when we look at our heritage there is an immense amount of value that sometimes you can't put a value on because we need to continue to preserve and protect that heritage. People say you need to know where you've come from to know where you're going. That's important for our Town."

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For further information email: info@AuroraCulturalCentre.ca

Please send a brief outline of your interest with a resume or CV by email to: info@AuroraCulturalCentre.ca by March 31, 2021 with the subject line Board of Directors.

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Marnie Maguire



Aurora author recognized by Irish Writers Centre

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Aurora writer Marnie Maguire has been named as one of 12 finalists in the Irish Writers Centre’s 2021 Novel Fair.

Described as “a Dragon’s Den for writers,” the Novel Fair introduces up-and-coming writers to publishers and literary agents “giving novelists the opportunity to bypass the slush pile, pitch their ideas and place their synopses and sample chapters directly into the hands of publishers and agents.”

Ms. Maguire, who is well-known to local writers as a creative writing coach with the Aurora Public Library, found her place in the Novel Fair with the mystery “Indecent.”

“Indecent” has been a labour of love for Ms. Maguire who has been working on the coming-of-age story for several years. This contest, however, brought renewed “motivation” to sit down and get it done.

“It was a literary coming of age, but when I went back to work on it, I threaded a mystery plot through it and made it a lot more fun and propelled the novel forward a lot more,” she says. “It is about an expelled high school senior who is terrified of inheriting her mother’s mental illness. The problem is she is hearing the voice of her dead

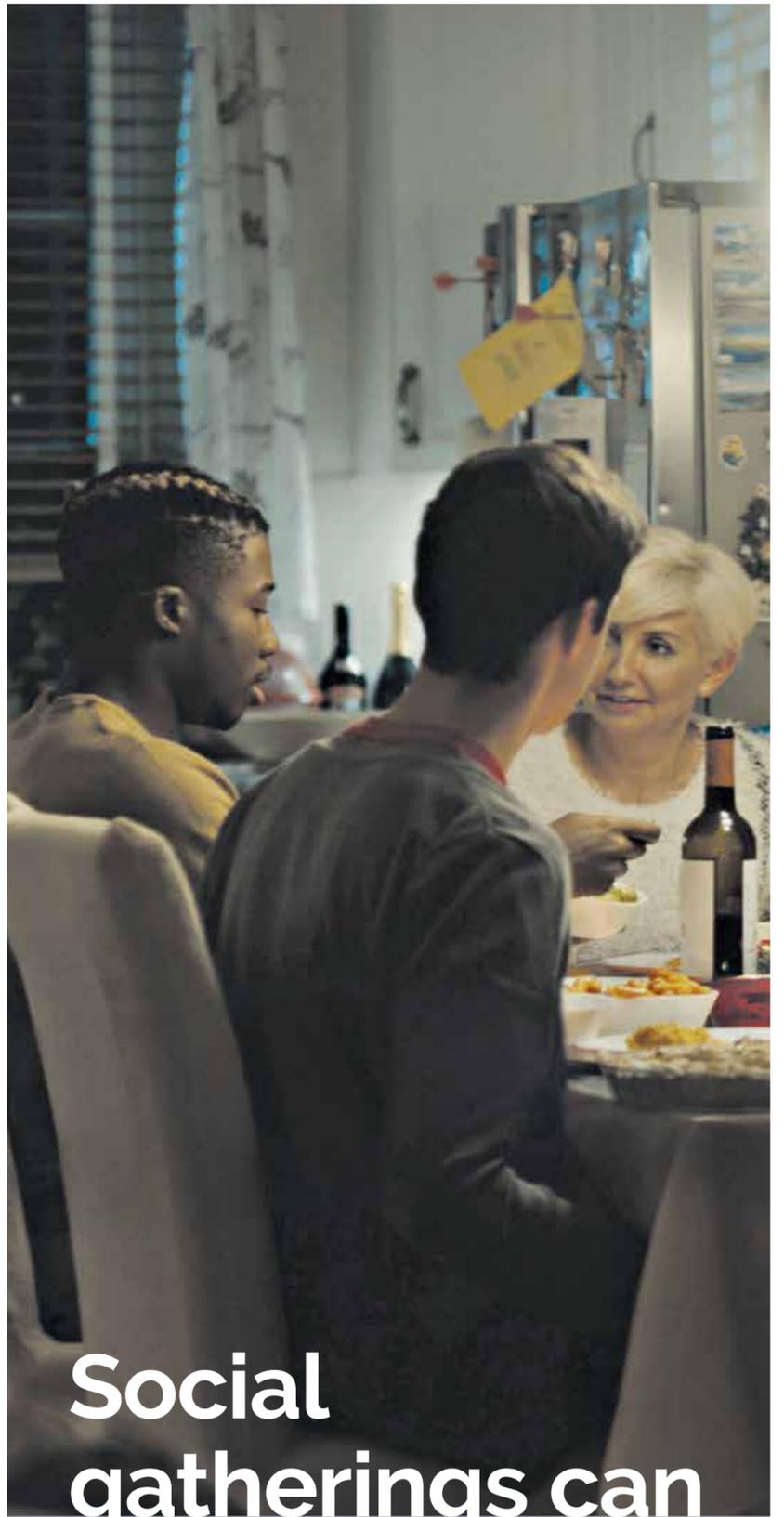
grandmother who is relaying the events that led up to her suspicious death 18 years earlier. As she pieces together the events that led up to her grandmother’s death, she also comes to terms with her stereotypes, suspicion and fear of mental illness herself.”

Putting the story forward for the 2021 Novel Fair was not only a boost in confidence but a learning opportunity as well.

“I have always been working on other people’s work,” says the literary mentor. “To finally get back to my own work and then have it validated just shortly after returning to it ... I should have words for it – I’m a writer! – but I don’t!

“It was a phenomenal experience for me: the most condensed, intense, positive learning experience I have had as a writer in the last twenty years. Starting at 5 am (because of the time change), I meet with umpteen publishers and agents. I had 15 minutes with each of them. Every time I pitched, the focus of my book and my characters became clearer and clearer. In the end, I was invited to send my novel (sometimes the entire manuscript; sometimes the first 50 pages) to nineteen publishers and agents.”

For more on the Irish Writers Centre and the Novel Fair 2021, visit irishwriterscentre.ie.



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School Board tackles anti-Black racism in new strategy

From page 1

incidents of anti-Black racism within their schools and workplaces, but also biases about “abilities and interests” that have sometimes impacted students’ pathways.

“We must address and work to eliminate instances of unfair outcomes for Black students and staff members,” said Louise Sirisko, Director of Education for the YRDSB. “Outcomes should not be predicated by skin colour. All students, families and staff members entering our doors should always know they are important and valued members of our school communities and will be treated with care and respect. The Dismantling Anti-Black Racism Strategy is our guide to accomplish the priorities and actions found within its pages.

“During these meetings [that guided the development of the strategy], members of the Anti-Black Racism Steering Committee shared experiences of anti-Black racism in our schools and workplaces against students, staff and families. Through these conversations, they also shared their wisdom and underscored the need for YRDSB to address incidents of anti-Black racism head on. It was their relentless commitment to ensure Black students receive an equitable education and their desire to dismantle anti-Black racism and unwavering advocacy that paved the way for this authentic collaboration and the development of a shared commitment to work with community members and the Ministry of Education towards dismantling anti-Black racism.

“Even though these conversations were sometimes difficult, our collective commitment to the important work of dismantling anti-Black racism never wavered. Each meeting highlighted the importance of centering our decisions on the best interests of students, on the importance of community voice and involvement, on the need to listen, and on having the courage to directly



address anti-Black racism on an individual and structural level.”

The first pillar of the plan is a “Commitment to Bold Leadership” straight at the top with the Director of Education and Superintendents setting direction. Through this pillar, senior leaders will ensure that the organization “embeds” its commitment to equity in its strategic plan; and tasks leaders with receiving regular updates on “racial disproportionalities and disparities” and incidents of anti-Black racism in schools.

The second priority is increasing the “racial literacy” of all staff members.

“The YRDSB recognizes that when people do not understand the structures of power (e.g.: white supremacy, colonialism, patriarchy, capitalism, heteronormativity) that shape the lives of Black students and communities, they are led to believe that racial inequality is the result of students’ shortcomings, a view that reinforces and perpetuates anti-Black racism.

“Racial literacy includes understanding that race is a socially constructed concept – not a biological reality – that was set up to control people on the basis of their skin colour.

Racial literacy means understanding that racism is more than a collection of individual acts of prejudice; racism is systemic and embedded within the education system as well as in broader society. Racial literacy involves understanding the intersections of power and race, being able to locate and analyse racial systems, possessing the grammar and vocabularies associated with racial discourse, such as white supremacy, anti-Blackness, racialization, racial identity and intersectionality, while learning how to differentiate terms such as ‘ethnicity,’ ‘nationality,’ ‘discrimination,’ ‘prejudice,’ and stereotyping. Racial literacy includes the ability to ‘read, recast and resolve’ racially stressful situations.”

The third plank in the plan is “Creating Black-Affirming Learning and Working Environments.”

This portion of the strategy calls on the YRDSB to “strengthen” its anti-racism protocol to address incidents of anti-Black racism while also providing clear guidance on “which acts are deemed inappropriate and the steps students, parents and staff can take to have them addressed.” A guide will be

developed to direct staff “on how to consistently and immediately interrupt and address acts of anti-Black racism that they witness or have been aware of.” Students will also be supported in the development of school-based campaigns to “dismantle” anti-Black racism and create anti-racist school environments.”

Additional pillars including hiring and supporting Black staff, “improving the ways in which Black parents, families and communities are able to engage with schools and the School Board,” improve academic outcomes for and the wellbeing of Black students, and creating “a culturally relevant and Black-affirming curriculum.

“Black students may be underperforming because they experience barriers to services and have long been underserved by the education system. As such, the YRDSB will strive to remove barriers, close opportunity gaps and address unwelcoming and racist school environments that undermine Black students’ mental health, push them out of mainstream learning environments and undermine their academic achievement.

“Addressing these issues includes reviewing the policies, protocols, practices and processes that may support disproportionalities and disparities in discipline, streaming, identification of special needs, engagement with policies, as well as over-reporting to the child welfare system.

“The YRDSB also recognizes the need to embed a culturally relevant curriculum and pedagogy to create identify-affirming learning spaces that recognize the diverse and interesting identities of Black students, and honour the ways of knowing and being of people of African descent. A culturally-relevant curriculum and pedagogy will not only allow Black students to flourish, but will also enable non-Black students to see people of African descent positively reflected throughout the curriculum.”

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3P Concept: Pain, Posture and Performance our reprieve from a seated life



Hip Bridges (top-left), Collapse Crawl Stretch (bottom left) and Median Nerve Flossing are three stretches anyone can do on a daily basis to relieve compression of the joints and muscles from being seated for too long. **Contributed photo**

By Robert Belardi

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, daily life shifted from being on the go and active to being stuck at home.

In many ways, this could have been beneficial to everyone. No morning traffic. No crowded subways. No commuting.

But, in other ways, this has been a detriment to our bodies. Being seated for many hours on a daily basis is compressing our muscles, tightening our joints and making it quite difficult to presumably move our bodies in ways we moved them before.

In light of these current predicaments, Caledon native Quinton Nurse, who is in the process of receiving his Doctor of Naturopathic Medicine degree at the Canadian College of Naturopathic Medicine, and registered massage therapist and owner of Araya Health Centre in Scarborough Christopher Araya, shared three stretches anyone can do on a daily basis that will help improve mobility.

Elite gymnasts, pro athletes and jujitsu fighters use these stretches to continue to enhance their performance. As the weather continues to get better (and hopefully it doesn't regress back to the cold), these can help your body be ready for when outdoor activities begin.

Collapse Crawl Stretch

Similar to the downward dog position in yoga class, the collapse crawl stretch (bottom-left of the photo), is a decompression exercise that benefits many areas of the body.

"That one is targeting your centre-mid-back between the shoulder blades and the side. The real purpose there is to help your T spine for middle spine mobility and the other one is to test what your functionality is," Nurse said.

In order to perform this stretch, do not fall into the stretch directly. You must ease into it slowly.

"You want to slowly crawl sideways with your fingertips until you feel a stretch," Araya said. "You crawl out, stretch, and slowly side-bend sideways. You isolate obliques, lats and rotator cuff."

This stretch that elite gymnasts perform, will enhance your posture and functional range of motion. This position helps to decompress the tightness in your back and in your rotator cuffs. This will relieve your joints and is a very common therapy.

Median Nerve Flossing

Just like tuning the strings of a guitar. Median Nerve Flossing is a technique that frees up this nerve that flows from the back of your neck all the way to your hand.

Nurse says this technique can alleviate the cause of up to 47 per cent of shoulder pain. It can also help elbow and wrist issues moving forward.

In order to do this stretch (diagram is on the right), you must stretch your arm out just below the shoulder. Your opposite hand is positioned on the shoulder of the arm that is extended.

"It's a sensation you cannot pinpoint. It's not like you're stretching one specific point. Nerve Flossing is a general region where you are achieving a bright sensation," Araya said.

With your arm extended outward and with your palm open, bend your hand downward to the floor and turn your neck in the direction of your arm. Following a few seconds, turn your neck the opposite way and turn your hand inward towards your body.

Just like flossing your teeth, this is moving the nerve back and forth. When someone has compression syndrome, muscles will compress the nerve. By freeing up the nerve, it will restore its function.

Hip Bridges

Jujitsu fighters use this one.

Hip Bridges are a way to take advantage of the neurological system in your body. It's also known as "reciprocal inhibition."

Our glutes and muscles around our hips are continuously compressed and this will help relieve tension and allow your body to extend the hip area.

"When you flex your glutes behind the hip, the front is relaxed automatically by your nerves which allows you to go through your range of motion and it gives you the activation of the glutes which are basically asleep all day."

To perform this stretch (top-left), lay on your back with your hands flat on the floor. Lift your hips while flexing your

glutes and hold that position for a short time and then come back down. Do this repeatedly a few times and you will see a difference.

To book a free consultation, you can do so on www.arayahealth.com.

For more information on these stretches and you can email Araya at arayahealth@gmail.com and Nurse at quintonnurse@gmail.com.

You can also check out Araya's "7 Pressure Points to Manage Soreness" e-book here www.arayaservices.com/araya-pressure-point-lead-gen1606437731723.

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Aurora Sports Hall of Fame on the lookout for nominations

By Robert Belardi

The Aurora Sports Hall of Fame's new social media strategy plays a key factor in promoting the nomination process, President Javed Khan says.

"The reason we're taking this strategy and tactic is to create some buzz and

awareness," Khan said. "You may know someone like this that's done some amazing things in our community as an athlete, a builder or a coach that you want to recognize as potential to get into the Hall of Fame."

This past week, the Hall of Fame has recognized previous winners Jim Clark and Ryan Gardner with special

video tributes posted on Instagram and Facebook.

This year, Khan hopes patrons will nominate more women.

"We need more females. We only have three females in our hall," Khan said.

He also says he hopes athletes, coaches or builders in sports other than hockey are promoted.

As of now, there are limited Hall of Fame representatives from soccer, baseball, and rugby.

The requirements to fill out the nomination process are quite simple. Nominees are only expected to check off one of the criteria that is established.

The nomination form must be completed

and can be downloaded off of the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame website. A 500-word proposal must be written describing the person's achievements in their sport. Documentation, such as newspaper clippings and anything to further support their proposal, is also required, along with a letter of endorsement.

The nomination process will officially close as of 12:00 p.m., March 26, 2021.

For any questions, you may email Khan at javed@empression.ca.

On March 16, Aurora HOF will be holding a Zoom meeting that will provide further information on the nomination process. Please email executiveassistant@aurorashof.ca for the Zoom details.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

From page 4

residents, is not an option.

Ultimately, implementation is only half the battle, and provincial and territorial governments must ensure that agreed standards are supported by appropriate governance and monitoring.

The lived experience of our representatives and legislators influence their perspectives and priorities. Women of all ages and communities bring their experiences to the table – experiences that are often overlooked when those women don't have a seat. The fact is decisions affecting the entire population should not be made without the proportional input of representation from all groups within the population, including women. This representation must be a stated and committed goal at

all levels of government. Specific actions and transparent targets to ensure that all levels of government strive for fair gender representation is critical to ensuring that the strengths, experiences and talents of over 50% of the population are brought to bear on helping to solve the issues we face and develop sustainable solutions going forward.

As women from all walks of life, we are choosing to challenge the current conditions and level of representation we have, so that we can contribute fully to the future of Canada.

Leah Taylor Roy
Aurora

(Editor's Note: Ms. Taylor Roy is the Federal Liberal Party's candidate for the riding of Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill)

York Curling Club still awaits their return to the sheets

By Robert Belardi

York Curling Club planned to return to the sheets in February, but a board decision ultimately closed the club until next year, Manager Jack Inouye says.

"As a result, initially the Board decided to delay start up from September to November, then from November to February, but eventually decided to remain closed for the season as did many clubs in Ontario. Most clubs in Ontario that did install ice, have either been shut down or have had very limited league curling this year," Inouye said.

Depending on the situation revolving around COVID-19, Inouye plans to bring curling back in the Fall with restrictions in place.

And, with some improvements to the facility as well.

"We have received a Trillium Grant to install touchless door openers on all the high traffic doors and HEPA air

cleaners in the lounge and locker rooms. Also, additional sanitizing protocols [have been installed] throughout the facility."

The club has six sheets of ice that would permit 48 curlers for a full draw. Inouye says, in most cases, 48 curlers would be competing at one time.

Inouye is hoping membership returns to pre-pandemic levels. He feels the longer the club is closed the less incentive members have to return.

"We will be doing a lot of promotions in social media once our schedule for the season is set. The Board is looking at promotional pricing for new members. This should be finalized over the summer," Inouye said.

For now, curlers have had the chance to enjoy Kerri Einarson win the Scotties Tournament of Hearts last week. The Tim Hortons Brier will begin last Saturday and then the men's and women's Curling World Championships will begin on March 20.



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Council could be limited in decision-making over new sidewalks

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Proposed changes to the rules on when and where new sidewalks are installed could remove Council from the decision-making process, at least at the outset.

This month, Council will consider revisions to existing sidewalk policies that would invest municipal staff with the power to authorize new sidewalk construction, while still allowing residents the chance to delegate to Council with their concerns over installation.

Delegating this authority away from Council to staff is not a new proposal and was last floated in September 2020. At the time, Council requested more information on this “delegated authority.”

This further report hit the Council table at last week’s General Committee and re-affirmed staff’s recommendation to go down this route.

“Sidewalks represent a critical component of the transportation network necessary to support a safe, accessible and walkable municipality,” said Traffic Analyst Michael Bat in his report. “The Town’s sidewalk policy enables the Town to install sidewalks where they are not present in order to remove barriers to accessibility, complete gaps in the Town’s active transportation network, and help all residents and visitors connect to transit, schools and other neighbourhood amenities.

“The major change [to the policy] is to assign the Director responsible for engineering services the authority to approve the installation of sidewalks on local roads where they are missing, on one or both sides of the right-of-way as part of road reconstruction projects in accordance with Town design standards.

“Property owners will continue to have the option of delegating to Council should they have a concern with the installation of a new sidewalk, but Council approval is no longer proposed to be part of this formal policy. However, Council can still provide direction to staff with regards to the installation and any modifications to the Town’s design standards for sidewalks.”

The revised and renewed proposal was once again met with mixed reviews by lawmakers.

Although the report notes that East Gwillimbury is the only municipality staff surveyed that requires Council approval for new sidewalks, some Council members say that adopting this policy would hinder residents coming to their representatives with their concerns.

“In the eight or nine years I have been on Council, yes, we have had some discussions regarding sidewalks, I think they have been fruitful discussions [and] I think it should remain a Council decision and I don’t see a strong rationale to give delegated authority to this,” said Councillor John Gallo. “It is one more avenue that we’re pushing the public away, in my opinion.”

This was a view shared by Councillor Wendy Gaertner who says communication with residents is very important.

“We seem to have done a pretty bad job with communications in at least the Kitimat instance” she said, referencing prolonged discussions over new sidewalks on the street to improve pedestrian safety surrounding Aurora Heights Public School. “The Kitimat issue lasted for a long time and was very Council time intensive, and I don’t know that we reached a resolution that the residents were happy with, but I do think sidewalks are very important and... I would like to stay in touch with that issue.”

Similarly, Councillor Rachel Gilliland said she too wanted the public to have their say.

“Delegated authority does streamline things, but I do want the public to have the opportunity to petition,” she said. “If there is an issue for whatever reason, it might not work everywhere. If it merits, I want to give them the opportunity. I want to dig into this further but, for now, I am just going to hold off in agreeing with this until we revisit this.”

Other Council members did not share these concerns.

Councillor Harold Kim, for instance, said he understood those of his colleagues but, in his view “safety and security trumps all things” and sidewalks fall under this banner.

“In areas of public safety, sometimes public consultation is not done,” he said. “I don’t think the government consulted with the public with regards to seat belts. In many rural areas that are becoming suburban areas where roads and homes are built, or homes are already there and roads are being reconstructed and paved, it is not consulted whether you want lights or not for safety purposes in these areas.

“I am in support of delegated authority on this matter and I do empathize with those that it may negatively impact on a day-to-day basis, but we do try to remediate that so that it is as few as possible. Overall, I would have to say this is an overall positive for the community and residents.”

In speaking in favour of the recommendations, Mayor Tom Mrakas emphasized the provision that will still allow members of the public to make delegations to Council on these issues.

“We go and we speak to staff about [what we hear from residents] and we look at bringing resolutions or solutions to those issues that are being brought to our attention,” he said. “That is always there regardless of if there is delegated authority. At the end of the day, this is about providing efficiency. Our residents will continue and always continue no matter whether we pass this or not... They can speak to each and every one of us. It is dependent upon not on the policy but on each and every one of us sitting at this table about what our thoughts are about how open we are and how we allow them to come in and speak to us.”



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Monday, March 22nd @ 10:00 am - 11:30 am

MindBeacon Mental Health Services
Mental Health, supports and programs
Wednesday, March 24th @ 10:00 am - 11:30 am

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Near \$17 million investment will address transit shortfalls due to COVID-19

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Ridership on York Region Transit has taken a hit due to the global pandemic, but, on Friday, the Province announced an investment of nearly \$17 million to address the financial impacts being faced by local transit systems.

\$16.7 million will be coming to York Region to “help municipalities continue to deliver critical transit services.”

“During the peak of the pandemic, ridership dropped up to 90 per cent of normal levels for some of Ontario’s transit systems, which resulted in significant financial impacts for municipalities,” said the Province.

Added Caroline Mulroney, Minister of Transportation: “We heard from municipalities and we are responding to their need for more support as COVID-19 continues to result in lost revenue and additional cost for transit systems. Transit operators have done an incredible job keeping transit operating during this challenging time and this support will help ensure there is reliable transportation [so] people can get to work or pick up essential items.”

The money is in addition to funding already provided under Ontario’s Safe Start Agreement, which has tasked municipalities with working with the Province to “explore options to ensure local transit is safe, sustainable, affordable and integrated both during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.”

To this end, the Province is allowing municipalities to use Safe Restart Agreement funding towards new

initiatives to make it easier and more affordable to travel between different transit systems like “adding capacity for on-demand micro transit and increasing fare and service integration across the Region.”

“Public transit is critical in helping ensure members of the community can get to where they need to go and in supporting York Region’s economic recovery,” said Newmarket-Aurora MPP Christine Elliott. “This additional funding of over \$16 million will help York Region continue to provide safe and reliable public transit to members of our community now and in the future.”

These sentiments were echoed by Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill MPP Michael Parsa.

“The financial challenges of the pandemic have been difficult for every municipality, including York Region. I am very happy to hear our government is investing an additional \$16,719,831 to support public transit in our community during this difficult time. This is a very exciting announcement for the residents of my riding and all of York Region who depend on these critical services.”

The funding, noted Regional Chair Wayne Emmerson, will be particularly important as the Region opens back up into the Red (Control) Zone.

“As more businesses and public spaces begin to open across York Region, more residents will be turning to transit to safely travel to and from work and other destinations,” he said. “This funding will ensure safe and reliable transit options that support the economic vitality of our communities.”

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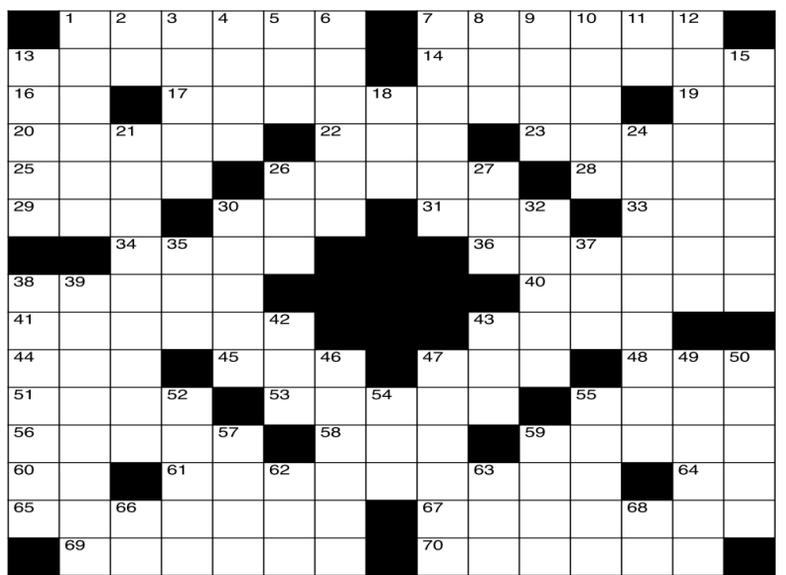


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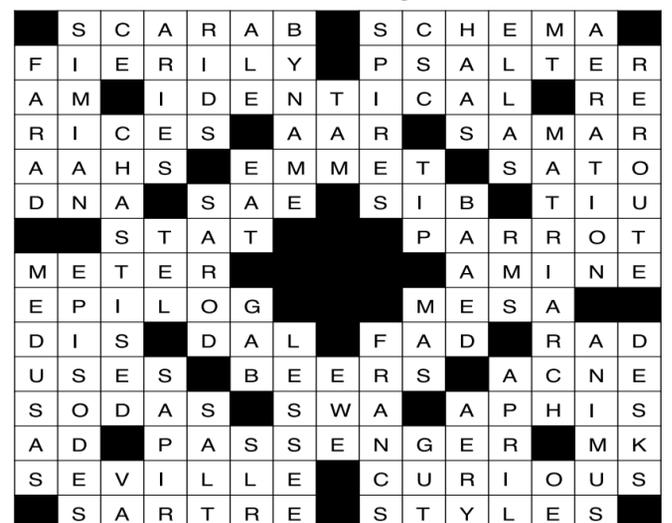
CLUES ACROSS

- 1. Large dung beetle
- 7. Representation of a plan
- 13. In a fervid way
- 14. The Book of Psalms
- 16. Morning
- 17. Exactly the same
- 19. About
- 20. Brown and basmati are two
- 22. Swiss river
- 23. Philippine island
- 25. Expressions of surprise
- 26. An ant
- 28. Common Japanese surname
- 29. Deoxyribonucleic acid
- 30. Car mechanics group
- 31. A person’s brother or sister
- 33. Ancient pharaoh
- 34. Quantitative fact
- 36. Vividly colored bird
- 38. Your home has one
- 40. Organic compound
- 41. Section at the end of a book
- 43. Flat tableland with steep edges
- 44. Criticize
- 45. Split pulses
- 47. Brief trend
- 48. Cool!
- 51. Purposes
- 53. Brews
- 55. Skin condition
- 56. Pops
- 58. American air travel company
- 59. Minute bug
- 60. Anno Domini (in the year of Our Lord)
- 61. One who rides in your car
- 64. One of the Gospels
- 65. City in southern Spain
- 67. Inquisitive
- 69. Jean Paul __, author
- 70. Pop singer Harry

CLUES DOWN

- 1. An ape or monkey
- 2. Chemical element
- 3. Zodiac sign
- 4. Removes
- 5. Brew
- 6. Nickname
- 7. Architectural structures
- 8. Trigonometric function
- 9. Postmodern architectural building in Vienna
- 10. Henderson and Fitzgerald are two
- 11. Mountain (abbr.)
- 12. Landscaping practice
- 13. Capacitance unit
- 15. Redirect
- 18. Hat for women
- 21. In a way, dressed down
- 24. Granny
- 26. Feed
- 27. Endpoint
- 30. Indian instrument
- 32. Bleated
- 35. Cablegram (abbr.)
- 37. Root mean square (abbr.)
- 38. Jellyfishes
- 39. Individual TV installments
- 42. Talk
- 43. More (Spanish)
- 46. Leaseholder
- 47. Monetary units
- 49. Hostility
- 50. Work stations
- 52. Linguistics giant
- 54. Female sheep
- 55. Calendar month
- 57. Seasoning
- 59. Lofty nest of a bird of prey
- 62. Single Lens Reflex
- 63. A way to remove
- 66. Virginia
- 68. Old English

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Steps spread some "sun" shine at St. Jerome



Contributed photo

By Kinjal Dagli Shah

Students and staff at St Jerome Catholic Elementary School were in for a pleasant surprise when they returned to the premises last month after an extended break due to the pandemic.

The stairwell at the school had been given a facelift with the help of motivational stickers made by a local company, Sundance Signs.

Each coloured a different hue, the stairs sported phrases like, "I am building my future," "Mistakes mean I am learning," and "My challenges help me grow."

"The project for St. Jerome School was initiated by their Mental Health and Wellness Committee. I was contacted by the principal, Ms. Luisa Rocca, and they wanted to support students during this difficult time. She wanted something bright, impactful and motivational. The project was a collaboration between Ms. Rocca and myself. She provided the quotes and I did my magic," said Bia Sherrard, owner of Sundance Signs. "It was quite exciting to bring Ms. Rocca's vision to reality. These kinds of projects are fun to do because they always bring amazing reactions once completed. It was a surprise reveal for students, teachers and staff when they returned to in-class learning."

The surprise reveal seems to have had its desired effect.

Gabriel Wehrenberg, a Grade 7 student at St Jerome School, said it makes him smile each time he takes the stairs.

"I read them going back up from the gym. The stickers make me reflect on the past and motivate me to feel and do better," he said.

Sherrard has undertaken similar projects at Cardinal Carter Catholic High School and Father Bressani Catholic High School in Woodbridge in the past.

The project gave a boost to her local business as well, which fell on hard times because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"COVID-19 has not been kind to my small business. The real bread and butter of my business is other local small businesses and, as we know, many aren't surviving the shutdowns. It has been a very challenging year," admitted Sherrard, who has lived in Aurora since the late 1980s.

Sherrard had to pivot her business to include custom graduation lawn signs, birthday banners, and special occasions signs in order to survive.

"By June of last year, these things were going like hot cakes. Even in times of crisis, it seemed like most people were able to spend a few dollars for a custom lawn sign to bring a smile to their loved ones' faces and to me that meant keeping busy safely, and being able to keep up with the bills."

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Are you hoping for the market to crash?



By Julien Laurion
The Big Tuna of Real Estate

WELL... we continue to proceed in unprecedented times. We are in a global pandemic, and the market is beyond crazy hot right now. If you are a seller, this is a great time to list your home!

There is very minimal supply, and there is an extremely high demand for detached homes.

For the foreseeable future, this pandemic has shown us that we will be working, living and spending much more time at home. Having had to endure lockdown in small spaces, many of these city dwellers are looking to move to the suburbs for more space.

As a result, for those looking to buy and get into this market, you may be thinking, I am going to wait until the market dips, and then I will buy. While that may happen and it may benefit your particular situation, a cheaper home doesn't

necessarily mean cheaper monthly payments.

Interest rates have never been so low, which makes the cost of borrowing money very reasonable. As soon as interest rates increase, even if the purchase price of the home is slightly lower, the cost of carrying the loan may actually be higher.

For example, at the current approximately 2% interest rate, a home listed in Aurora for \$500k with a 20% down payment will cost approximately \$1,694 a month. Now, if that same home is listed for 450k and you have a 20% down payment, BUT the interest rate is now 3.99%, your approximate monthly payment would be \$1,892 a month. For some, that extra \$200 a month on top of all the other household expenses could be a deal-breaker.

Right now, we are in uncharted waters, and it's very critical that you take the time to work with a

professional who understands this market. It could be very easy to get swept up in the drama of a bidding war and put yourself in a tough position financially. I am happy to discuss and answer any questions you might have! Spring market here we come!!!

Julien Laurion AKA Big Tuna is a local Real Estate Sale Representative with Royal LePage Your Community Realty in Aurora. I am a real estate agent who has expertise in both Real Estate and Renovations and has been involved in this community for over 20 years. If you have a question for my monthly article or if you are considering buying, selling or leasing a home please feel free to call or email me directly at (416) 402-5530 or julien@bigtuna.ca or by alternatively visiting my website www.bigtuna.ca or Facebook page @bigtunarealty

SPRING CLEANING Tips for safe use of household chemical products

(NC) As the days get noticeably longer and milder, we emerge from winter hibernation and giving our home a good spring cleaning suddenly appears on the to-do list.

Household cleaning chemicals can have an important role in keeping kitchens and bathrooms clean. However, if they're not used safely, they can find their way beyond the kitchen or bathroom walls, posing a risk to your health and those around you.

By following these tips, you can keep you and your family safe when you tackle household chores.

- 1. CAREFULLY READ THE PRODUCT LABEL.** Is there a hazard symbol on the label? If there is, be sure you understand what it means and carefully follow the warnings.
- 2. USE CHEMICALS CAREFULLY.** All that fine print under "directions for use" in household chemical products is there for a good reason. It explains how to use the product safely.
- 3. LET THE FRESH AIR IN.** Ensure proper ventilation by opening windows or doors and running exhaust fans during and after cleaning.
- 4. DON'T MIX CHEMICAL PRODUCTS.** Never mix household chemical products together. Some mixtures can produce harmful gases. Bleach products should never be mixed with other cleaning products.
- 5. STORE HOUSEHOLD CHEMICALS SAFELY.** Keep all household chemical products in their original containers, safely stored where children cannot see or reach them. Try not to store products that may release harmful fumes or catch fire inside your home. These items include solvents, gasoline, fuels or varnishes. Store them according to the instructions on the product's label in a separate building if you can, or in an area that is well vented to the outside.
- 6. DISPOSE PRODUCTS PROPERLY.** Check your city or town's guidelines for instructions on how to dispose of hazardous household waste. As well, check the label for disposal directions. Don't pour unused chemical products down the drain or burn or bury them.

Find more information on keeping a healthy home at canada.ca/healthy-home.

www.newscanada.com

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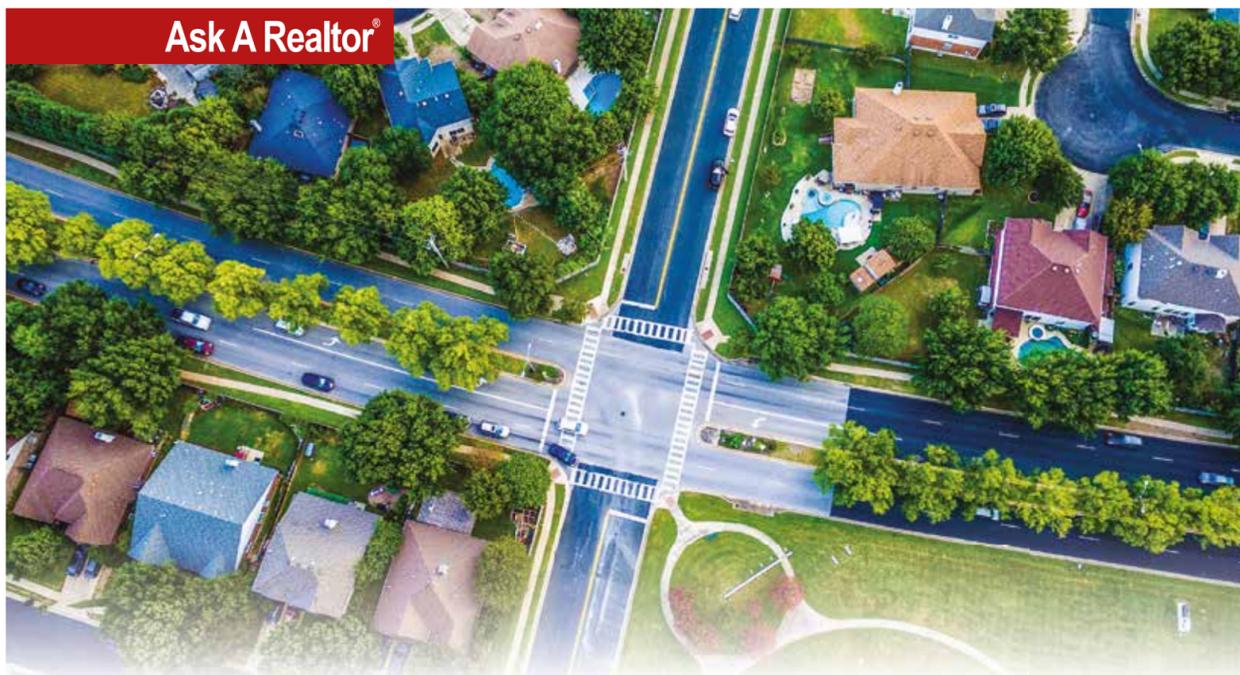
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We're thinking of widening our home location search to see what else might be available.

Do you think we will get more home for our money?

As home sales continued to rise in February, pushing pricing to double-digit growth compared to last year, interest rates remain extremely low; some Buyers are feeling anxious to purchase, fatigued from multiple offer scenarios on homes for sale and outpriced from their target locations.

Competition in the Greater Toronto Area and beyond continues. Affordability improves the further the commute, typically away from Toronto. People who may not have considered the GTA suburbs have changed their minds since the COVID-19 pandemic was declared across Ontario a year ago. Buyers have been able to consider areas further from their ideal location, feeling there's less demand for employees and entrepreneurs to commute. Instead, many work from home more than ever. A longer commute to a workplace may be forgiven if the hours are flexible; the days commuting are reduced which saves on commuting expense, time and size of home for money spent is increased.

The best thing a Buyer can do is have an open conversation with their workplace as to whether these changes may be here to stay. Home pricing seems to be increasing by the week, and competition for the low inventory of homes for sale remains high, driving pricing to new normals across the GTA and surrounding regions. Being priced out of an area may not be a permanent situation. But, many Buyers are feeling too anxious to wait and see when the housing market will correct to a more balanced market. When there are more homes for sale to choose from and fewer Buyers, typically means average home pricing decrease. The rise in home prices is affecting all sorts of conditions of homes as well. To be competitive many are opting not to have licensed inspections conducted beforehand. Those wanting an investment property to flip may find it tougher to find the low-cost gems to build quick equity in. As prices increase, many Buyers additionally need to widen their area home search, which drives demand further geographically.

Widening a geographic search for a home may open new possibilities of value and how life will work once the Buyers relocate. With population growth expansion continuing across the Greater Toronto Area, there is more convenience being added to manage the population increases and small towns that may have had limited amenities and infrastructures have certainly been experiencing growth. It's a great exercise to view the planning department expansion plans for towns in question to understand future growth plans. Competition may still be stiff as the search widens, depending on the price range the buyer is pre-approved for.

Call a REALTOR® today to discuss competitive buyer strategies and complete a comprehensive home buyer analysis to set the course towards a successful home purchase.

— Written by Connie Power
 Connie Power is Manager, Real Estate Sales Representative CNE® SRS® ABR® SRES® for RE/MAX Hallmark York Group Realty Ltd., Brokerage serving York region and beyond. Empowering you in real estate!
 **Not intended to solicit those currently under a real estate contract

Is your internet too slow? It's probably not you

(NC) We all know the aggravation of a school lesson that just won't stop freezing or the family video call that looks more like a photo montage. And, as we adjust to the impact of COVID-19 on our day-to-day, that slow connection can have frustrating consequences.

Working from home and learning remotely, both need fast, stable internet, something not enough Canadians have yet. Even if you have fast devices in your home, if the infrastructure in your area is not optimal, your connection won't be either.

Right now, cities have the infrastructure needed to ensure access. But rural and remote communities are hugely underserved, with fewer than half having high-speed internet, and fewer than a third of households on reservations have high-speed connections.

Fortunately, change is coming. The Universal Broadband Fund is backing projects across Canada right now to ensure the reliable, high-speed internet connections families need to work, study, access services online, and safely stay in touch with each other.

The fund existed before COVID, but as a response to the pandemic, its timetable has been moved up by four years to a target of 98 per cent of Canadians with high-speed internet access by 2026. With the faster pace, at least 90 per cent of us should be connected by the end of 2021.

The fund is focused on improvements in rural and remote communities across Canada to fix the disconnect between internet access for urban and rural households. This means more remote work opportunities, better access to remote learning and safer access to health-care, no matter where you live.

It's not just for good connections at home, either. The improvements mean much better access to mobile networks on highways between remote communities. The result is better, safer navigation and access to emergency services for your family, even on the road in the middle of nowhere. Mobile projects will be focused on serving Indigenous communities and the roads leading to them.

The shape these improvements will take in your area will depend on where you live. Canada is huge, and its communities are hugely diverse, with diverse needs. Keep an eye out for local projects — they're a small part of something much bigger.

Find more information at canada.ca/getconnected.

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Helping support the community

With the current restrictions within York Region and to keep the community safe, the Key Advantage Team was unable to host their annual Client Appreciation Event this year. In lieu of the event, they still wanted to show their sincere appreciation by donating to the Royal LePage Shelter Foundation on behalf of their clients and referral partners to help those who do not have a safe place to call home. In addition to this donation, a portion of every commission the team makes is donated to the Royal LePage Shelter Foundation on their client's behalf. Together, we can make a difference.

Tips to improve WiFi around the house

Speedy, reliable internet is something people have quickly grown accustomed to. That's no doubt why dropped WiFi signals can be so frustrating.

Various things can contribute to slow or interrupted Wi-Fi. As a result, there's no one-size-fits-all solution to address underperforming Wi-Fi. But that's good news, as it means there's an assortment of strategies that consumers can try to improve the Wi-Fi in their homes.

Upgrade your router. Many people rent their routers from their internet service providers, but it may surprise some to learn that they can buy their own. Buying your own router can be beneficial in various ways, not the least of which is it can save money. Router rental fees vary, but they typically cost between \$10 and \$15 per month. Consumers will save money in the long run by buying their own router rather than renting one from their ISP. When buying their own routers, consumers also can pick from a host of options, including routers with strong performance ratings that may contribute to better WiFi performance.

Set up automatic firmware updates. It's easy to forget a router after it's been plugged in, and internet service starts working. However, manufacturers routinely issue firmware updates to improve router performance. Turning on automatic updates may improve WiFi performance, and such updates also can provide a host of additional benefits, including added security measures.

Relocate the router. PCMag.com notes that the location of the router can affect WiFi performance. If possible, locate the router in the center of the home so it can easily reach all parts of the house. Locating wireless routers away from walls and other obstructions also may improve performance.

Switch frequencies. Switching frequencies can help wireless consumers whose service might be adversely affected by congestion. Consumer Reports notes that wireless congestion can affect WiFi performance in apartment buildings and densely populated neighbourhoods. In such instances, consumers can check their routers to see if they're running on the 2.4 GHz frequency band. If so, switching them to the 5 GHz band, which has more channels and is likely to be less congested, may improve WiFi performance.

Slow and/or interrupted WiFi signals can be very frustrating. Thankfully, various strategies can help consumers quickly remedy such issues.



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How to choose the right lighting inside your home

Lighting in a home serves both practical and aesthetic purposes. It's easy to maneuver around a well-lit home, reducing the risk of slips and falls, and the right lighting can help homeowners create their desired ambiance, which typically changes depending on which room you're in.

When choosing lighting for their homes, homeowners must walk a fine line between appearance and functionality. A fixture in the foyer that instantly impresses visitors likely won't prove as awe-inspiring if it's installed in the living room. When choosing lighting for a home, some general rules about what works in each room can help homeowners make the most informed decision.

KITCHEN

Kitchens are often the busiest room in a home, so lighting here can be especially important. A kitchen often benefits, both practically and aesthetically, from different types of lighting. For example, pendant lighting above kitchen islands can make meal preparation easier and safer, but such lighting likely

won't work in breakfast nooks and informal dining areas in the kitchen. Recessed lighting works best in such areas. In kitchens with no island, under-cabinet lighting can be used to illuminate countertops and simplify meal preparation.

FORMAL DINING ROOM

Many people enjoy the look of chandeliers in formal dining rooms, and such fixtures can be installed directly above the dinner table. The interior design experts at Better Homes & Gardens advise hanging chandeliers roughly 33 inches above the table in dining rooms with eight-foot ceilings, adding three inches for each additional foot above eight feet. Darkened dining areas may be ideal in restaurants, but homeowners may want to split the difference at home and choose dimmable chandeliers for their

...A professional consultation with a lighting expert or interior decorator can help homeowners...

dining rooms. This allows homeowners to dim the lights for romantic dinners but turn them up for family gatherings with lots of people around the table.

LIVING ROOM

Adaptability is important in the living room, where homeowners may host anything from movie nights to book clubs to parties for the big game. It can be a tall order to accommodate such a wide range of activities, and many homeowners come down to deciding between recessed lighting and track lighting. If the living room currently has neither style, homeowners should recognize that it will cost considerably less to install track lighting than recessed lighting. Better Homes & Gardens notes that flexible track lighting provides ambient, task or accent lighting. Track lights can even be moved to change lighting schemes at any time, making them a budget-friendly option for homeowners whose living rooms are multi-purpose spaces. Recessed lighting also works well in living rooms, especially ones with low ceilings. That's because recessed lighting is installed into the ceiling, meaning it does not take up any visual space in the room. That can help living rooms feel bigger.

BEDROOM

The home improvement experts at BobVila.com note that bedroom lighting should provide enough light when getting dressed, but also be able to be toned down as residents prepare for their bedtime routines. Both portable and installed lighting can be used in bedrooms to serve these various functions. Recessed fixtures that dim can ensure there's ample light to get dressed in the morning, but they also can be dimmed at night as residents try to get ready to sleep. Portable nightstand lights can make it easier for couples sharing a bedroom, allowing one person to stay up and read while the other goes to sleep.

Homeowners have many options and many needs when choosing lighting for their homes. A professional consultation with a lighting expert or interior decorator can help homeowners find lights that provide both practical and aesthetic appeal.

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**RESALE
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5 tips to create an at-home spa experience

(NC) A visit to the spa might not be an option for many of us, so here are five quick tips to create a spa-like experience in the comfort and safety of your own home.

Atmosphere Lighting, scent and calming music are all key elements associated with a visit to the spa. Candles are quick and easy mood-enhancing items that not only add softness to lighting, but can also be used to introduce aromatherapy. Lavender is a great aromatherapy option because it promotes a sense of wellness and calm.

GET STEAMY While a warm bath is a go-to ritual for many, you can also dial up your in-home spa game by converting your shower into a mini steam room. Turn your shower on with high heat to steam up your bathroom, grab an exfoliating scrub or loofah to remove dead skin cells and finish with a shower.

DIY FACIAL Consider turning your bedroom into a treatment room. When trying a new or trusted facial mask, remember to choose one that targets your skin-care concerns — such as dry skin, clogged pores, or anti aging. You can also add a foot mask, hand mask, under-eye mask or lip mask for an extra-targeted boost of hydration.

TRY NEW TOOLS Explore adding a new and affordable skin tool to your at-home spa. Depending on your skin's needs, choose from a variety of devices such as sonic cleansers to remove impurities and minimize pores, or microdermabrasion tools to reduce the appearance of acne scars and age spots.

You can also try an online skin analysis tool, which uses new technology to provide a customized summary of your skin health. "The virtual skin tool from Shoppers Drug Mart is the next step in learning more about your skin and having personalized products recommended," said Chanel Cruz, a Shoppers beauty pro.

MANI/PEDI TIME Complete your spa experience with a manicure or pedicure. After your skin is prepped and hydrated, finish by trimming and shaping your nails and pushing down your cuticles. Top with nail colour and topcoat if desired.

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Embracing the Japanese art of imperfection at home

(NC) The unexpected challenges and changes of 2020 have taught us that not everything can be perfect or go as planned all the time.

Wabi-sabi is a Japanese term, meaning to find beauty in imperfection. But it isn't just a philosophy for life, it's also a design philosophy that you can incorporate into any space.

Embrace beautiful imperfection at home and check out these tips from Sharon Grech, Benjamin Moore colour and design expert.

BE INSPIRED BY NATURE

To get comfortable with wabi-sabi, take your cue from nature. Choose a palette inspired by natural spaces, textures and materials like surf, sky and sand to create spaces that welcome and comfort.

Enhance your neutral palette by inviting organic materials and handmade pieces. "From live-edge wood furniture, to hand-thrown pottery and lush greenery, natural textures will help create a sense of calm, space and lightness in any home," says Grech.

SEEK INSPIRATION FROM THE IMPERFECT

As we look to the year ahead, now is the time to reflect use of wabi-sabi in colour and design. Find inspiration in beautiful, imperfect natural materials such as linen and terracotta.

"Paint colours like Potters Clay CC-30 and Muslin OC-12 take their names and inspiration from craftsmanship and lend laid-back elegance to any room."

CHOOSE AUTHENTICITY OVER PERFECTION

Instead of obsessing over making every detail perfect, opt for authenticity and imperfection. Choose furniture in organic, rounded shapes, instead of more angular, streamlined styles to instantly make your space more welcoming.

Adding rounded mirrors, or painting an arched colour block on a wall will add interest and a free-form touch to even the most modern spaces.

"With Regal Select interior paint you can easily achieve beautiful results for a DIY colour block that adds visual interest and wabi-sabi style to any room, even if you make a couple mistakes."

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RESALE HOMES COLLECTIONS

Differences in dishwasher loading styles may cause household tension

(NC) Have you ever come home from a long day and opened the dishwasher to tidy up only to see it's loaded in the worst way possible and your dishes are still dirty?

Everyone has experienced that moment where their partner, roommate or kid has loaded the dishwasher like a poorly played game of Tetris. In fact, 33 per cent of Canadians surveyed with a dishwasher say they are dissatisfied with how some or all others in the household load the appliance.

To help you avoid disagreements, finding the right dishwasher that gives you flexibility is essential. Here are some tips for what to look for and how to load:

- Remove excess food before loading.
- Make sure all dishes are facing downward.
- Follow the grooves and inserts.
- Load silverware in mixed patterns to avoid cutlery sticking together.
- Be careful not to overload.
- Look for features like three racks for added space and/or adjustable racks that help you customize each load. For example, KitchenAid offers dishwashers with features like a third rack that have dedicated wash systems and an adjustable middle rack to fit larger items.
- Consider a dual-power filtration system that filters out, chops up, then drains food from the dishwasher in extra small pieces, helping prevent clogs so you can skip the soaking, scrubbing, and pre-rinsing altogether. Maytag offers a reliable option which also has a third rack.

Try these simple loading tricks and consider a dishwasher with a third rack and you will be sure to avoid any future dish-loading disagreements.

www.newscanada.com



The average timelines for popular **RENOVATION PROJECTS**

HOME RENOVATION PROJECTS are significant undertakings. Working with skilled and experienced contractors can ensure projects go smoothly and are completed promptly. Timing is a big consideration for homeowners as they begin renovating their homes, and the home improvement experts at HomeAdvisor note that the following are some general timelines for popular renovation projects.

HOME ADDITION

Short of a full-scale demolition and rebuild, home additions are the most time-consuming projects homeowners can undertake. HomeAdvisor notes that its survey of customers who recently completed home addition projects reported that the average time from start to finish was between three and four months. Certain variables, including the scale of the project and the local permit process, can extend the time it takes to complete a home addition.

KITCHEN REMODEL

Scale is a big factor to consider when estimating the time it takes to complete various home improvement projects, and kitchen remodels are no exception. Some HomeAdvisor users reported projects taking as long as four months, though the average time

reported was roughly six weeks. Projects that require major overhauls like rearranging the plumbing and moving walls will likely take longer than more cosmetic projects that are limited to replacing cabinets and countertops.

BATHROOM REMODEL

More than 1,000 homeowners surveyed by HomeAdvisor reported that bathroom remodels took about 4.5 weeks from start to finish. Small-scale remodels that focus on painting the walls a fresh colour and replacing existing tiles can be completed in less than two weeks. But like with kitchen remodels, bathroom remodels that involve replacing plumbing fixtures and removing walls figure to take much longer than that.

SIDING INSTALLATION

HomeAdvisor users report that new siding projects take roughly two weeks from start to finish. That estimate is the same regardless of which materials homeowners are replacing and installing.

REPLACEMENT WINDOWS

Homeowners who want to replace all the windows in their home can expect such a project to take

roughly three weeks. HomeAdvisor notes that such a timeline need not concern homeowners worried that they will be forced to brave the elements during the length of the project. Much of a contractor's time during a window replacement project will be spent on upfront measuring and then ensuring a tight fit once the windows have been installed.

...Timing is a big consideration for homeowners as they begin renovating...



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Renovation trends

that figure to be popular in the year ahead

HOME RENOVATION TRENDS are ever-changing. Renovations that might have been de rigueur 20 years ago may seem dated now. Recognizing the potentially popular trends of tomorrow is a great way for homeowners to give their homes a fresh new look and put themselves in a position to capitalize on popular trends when they put their homes on the market. That's especially so after 2020, a year when millions of people spent more time at home than ever before. All that time working from home and relaxing at home gave millions of homeowners ideas about what they like about their home and what they hope to change. The following are some renovation trends that various experts suspect could emerge in 2021.

ECO-FRIENDLY LIVING

Web magazine, urdesignmag.com, that showcases creative trends in design, architecture, art, technology, and fashion, predicts that eco-friendly living solutions figure to be hot commodities in 2021. Eco-friendly appliances, furniture and designs can help to conserve energy and reduce waste. Environmentalists and government agencies like the Environmental Protection Agency note are two critical components in the fight against climate change.

LARGE WINDOWS

Large windows can provide stunning views of the outdoors and allow ample natural light into a home. It may not be a coincidence if large windows prove to be a hot trend in 2021. The COVID-19 pandemic that dominated much of 2020 forced many people to spend considerably more time at home. Darker homes without much natural light can adversely affect mood,

...potentially popular trends of tomorrow is a great way for homeowners to give their homes a fresh new look...

especially when people are spending more time at home. HGTV predicts that homeowners will seek ways to bring more natural light into their homes in 2021, and large windows naturally brighten homes while making rooms appear bigger, helping people feel less cramped. That's an especially beneficial characteristic when spending more time indoors at home.

MINIMALISM

The anticipated popularity of minimalism in 2021 may also be connected to the pandemic. As professionals, we're forced to work from home and many families spent more time together inside their homes than ever before, they may have recognized a need to cut back on clutter, including extra furniture. A minimalist approach is both simple and clean, which can make homes feel less claustrophobic.

MULTI-FUNCTIONAL SPACES

Homeowners asked a lot of their homes in 2020, as rooms were transformed into multi-functional spaces seemingly overnight. HGTV notes that spending more time at home showed homeowners that it may not make sense to dedicate entire rooms of a home to a single purpose. Renovations that can help homeowners transform rooms into multi-functional spaces figure to be hot commodities in the years ahead.

Real Estate Market Update – Aurora



Buyers Pushing into Aurora

The cold didn't deter home Buyers in the month of February from snapping up 118 homes of all descriptions across Aurora's ten neighbourhoods which was 47.5 percent more sales than in the prior month. The average home price for all types of homes rose to \$1,238, 894 and upon further examination by eliminating the highest and lowest sale the median average price in February was \$1,109,056.

The trend of competing offers continued and homes sold swiftly within 14 days on the market for about 107 percent of the asking price in this strong Seller's market. There were 196 homes placed for sale, and by March 1st, 2021, only 124 remained for sale, meaning at the current demand, it would take 1.8 months to deplete the inventory currently available for sale.

Upon closer examination of the sales in February, 66 percent of the homes purchased were detached homes at an average median price of \$1.4 Million; that's a \$380,000 price increase year over year. Townhomes rose to an average of \$1,048,000 from \$785,000; Semi-detached homes rose to \$990,000 from \$800,000,

Condo townhomes rose to \$745,000 from \$446,750. Condo apartments that sold had an average price of \$540,000 with just a \$30,000 increase in value compared to the remaining home types.

Low-interest rates persist, however with rising home values some buyers may be temporarily priced out of the town of Aurora depending on their buying criteria, opting for the area further out of the Greater Toronto Area. Contact a REALTOR® today to discuss your motivation to buy or sell real estate.

– Written by Connie Power

Connie Power Manager / Sales Representative CNE® SRS® ABR® SRES® for RE/MAX Hallmark York Group Realty Ltd., Brokerage serving York region in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). Empowering you in Real Estate, Call Connie today to make an appointment to discuss your next move at (905) 726-0856.

*The statistics provided herein were obtained from the Toronto Regional Real Estate Board; Regional Housing Market Tables; York Region, Aurora for January, February 2021 and market Watch Summary of Existing Home Transactions, All Home Types, for February 2021.

***Not intended to solicit those currently under a real estate contract.

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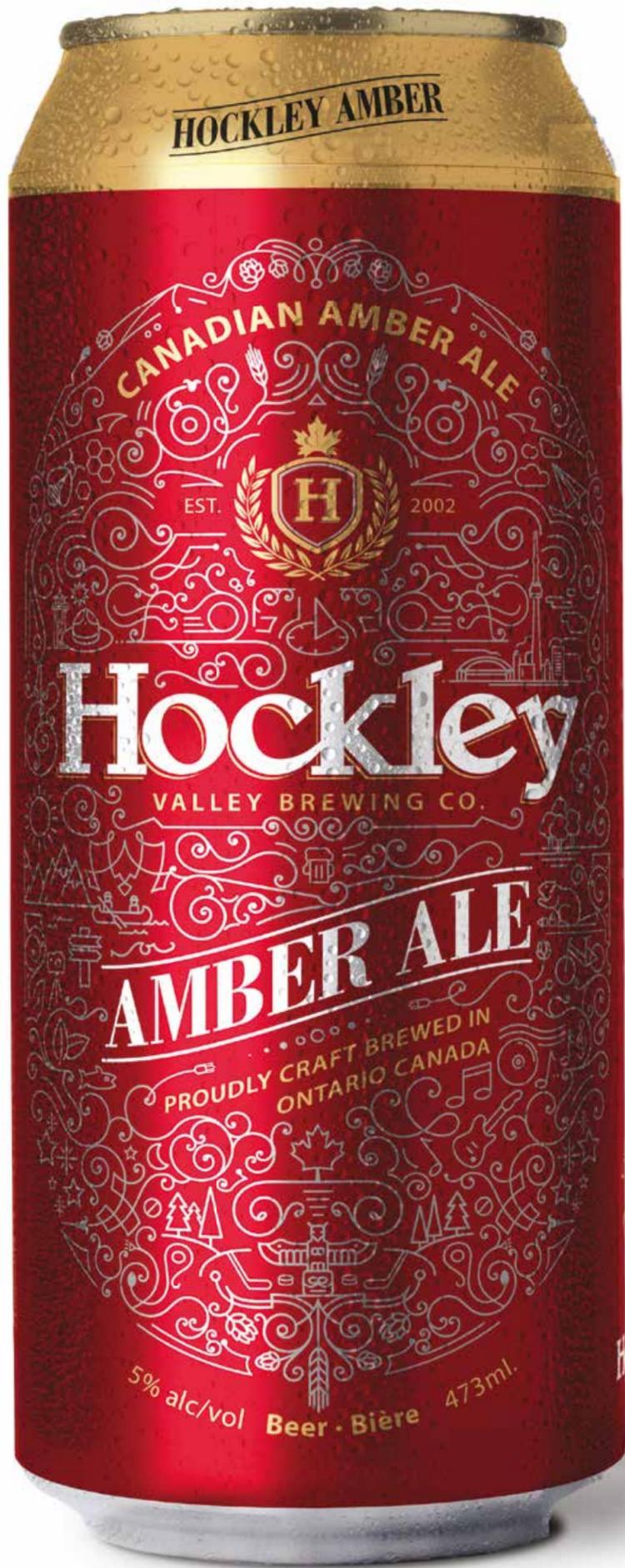
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