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WEEK OF JANUARY 22, 2026



**SHARING WORLDVIEWS** – The countdown is on to the opening of the Mayor's Celebration of Youth Art (MCOYA), which opens at the Aurora Cultural Centre on Friday, February 6, and last week, Grade 12 art students at St. Anne's School – Zara Martin, Claire Thorne, Bettina Zeng, Becca Duicu, and Lindsay Fu – shared a sneak preview of some of their inspirations ahead of the grand opening. For more on what promises to be the biggest MCOYA yet, see Page 13.

Auroran photo by Brock Weir



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## Downtown Aurora's Community Planning Permit system could be in place by February

BY BROCK WEIR  
EDITOR  
LOCAL JOURNALISM  
INITIATIVE REPORTER

A bold new vision for Aurora's historic downtown core could be on the books by the end of this month as Council looks at ways to intensify the area while still maintaining its heritage. Council, sitting at the Committee level last week, gave the tentative green light to approving an Official Plan

Amendment allowing the Community Planning Permit System (CPPS) to take root. The CPPS is intended to streamline the Town's zoning, site plan, and minor variance application systems into one streamlined approvals process. It would also give the municipality a greater say over development projects in the downtown, setting clear expectations on what the Town is looking for, how they

dovetail with the existing community, and how it incorporates the heritage facades of existing buildings. The CPPS proposal was last before Council in the fall. While some resents said they were concerned over the traffic and parking impacts that might result from more people living in the core, along with the impact construction might have on Victorian homes in the

Continued on page 8



An artists' rendering of what Aurora's historic downtown core could look like with further intensification and redevelopment. Image courtesy of the Town of Aurora

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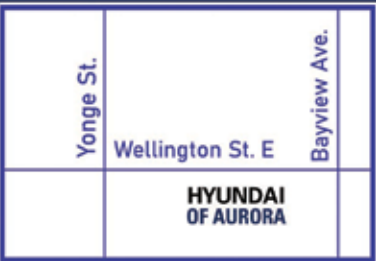
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# Former Cabinet Minister to provide keynote at Black History Month Gala



Award-winning entertainer George St. Kitts, seen here at last year’s Black History Month gala at Northridge Community Church, will once again take the stage when the event re-locates to the Royal Venetian Mansion on Saturday, February 7.  
**Auroran file photo by Glenn Rodger**

**BY BROCK WEIR**  
EDITOR  
LOCAL JOURNALISM  
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Former Federal Cabinet Minister Marci Ien will be the keynote speaker at the Aurora Black Community Association’s upcoming Black History Month Gala.

Commemorations of February as Black History Month will kick off Friday, January 30, at Aurora Town Hall with the ceremonial raising of the Pan African Flag, and continue on Saturday, February 7, with the Gala.

Set for the Royal Venetian Mansion on Industrial Parkway South from 5 – 9 p.m., this year’s theme is “Collective Strength, Shared Future.”

“We really want people to leave feeling empowered, inspired, and understand the depth of community-building and richness within our community,” says Aurora Black Community Founder and President Phiona Durrant.

Previous Black History Month gala themes have included “One Love”, which continues to be a guiding philosophy of

the ABC, “Opening Doors and Making Room”, and “Forward Together,” but this year Durrant says she was looking for a theme that summed up all of that while also highlighting a community’s collective strength.

“Something that’s always resonated with me personally is one hand can’t clap, and that’s something my grandfather taught me,” she says. “It’s collective strength. We don’t get here alone – that includes the shoulders we stand on to be here like Dr. Jean Augustine [who led the way for Black History Month to be marked in Canada], and those shoulders we have to treat with honour.

“We’re honoured and so humbled they have already laid that foundation for us and that shared future.”

While the Black History Month Gala was originally announced last year as a collaboration between the ABC and the Newmarket African Canadian Caribbean Association (NACCA), the ABC is now steering the event to completion solo. While Durrant and the ABC’s Endra Musewe say that development is

“unfortunate,” they remain focused on the theme.

“We’re making it a really fun, joyous time, and also really celebrating Black culture – and just the diversity in Black culture as well because a lot of times I don’t think people are exposed to it,” says Musewe. “Music is a big part of the culture, and there will be a fireside chat with Marci Ien, and that is going to be very interesting, just showcasing the Black community to the broader community.”

Marci Ien, a former CTV broadcaster, served as Member of Parliament for Toronto Centre from 2020 – 2025 and, from 2021 to 2025 served as Canada’s Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Youth. She declined to seek re-election in the 2025 Federal Election.

While Ien has not been previously involved with the ABC’s work, Durrant says the former politician was drawn to the community-centred work carried out by the Association.

In addition to the fireside chat, ticket-holders will be able to ask some questions as well.

“People will be leaving with a little bit of this and a little bit of that because there’s so much that will be taken on in that two-hour program,” says Durrant. “The community has never failed the ABC because when ABC shows up, we don’t show up just for Black things, we show up for community and, as a result, the reciprocity is always there and the Town of Aurora, as a municipality, is standing beside us, not behind us. It’s just surrounding us with that support. We could not ask for anything better, so this is going to be super, super amazing.”

Adds Musewe: “We want people to understand the rich culture here.”

*For more information about the upcoming Flag Raising Ceremony and the Black History Month gala, including how to reserve and secure your tickets, visit [aurorablackcommunity.com](http://aurorablackcommunity.com).*

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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

MP’s column shows other side of the coin, says reader

(Re: Reader questions MP’s column, January 15)

Norma McClinton takes issue with our MP’s critique of the current government or any explanation of the opposition’s policy agenda in his newspaper column.

It appears she wants to censure communications from our MP that she views as not positive towards the current government. However, I believe that anyone who wants Canada to thrive should be interested in understanding what problems have been created by flawed policies and what solutions are needed going forward.

Unfortunately, anyone who watches the House of Commons question period or committee sessions would be concerned about what our government is doing.

Most people do not have the time to follow these proceedings so it is refreshing to learn what is happening from MP Costas Menegakis.

As a member of the Opposition, his job is to hold the government to account for bad legislation or policies that are hurting Canadians. He is reporting on his efforts to improve the situation for all of his constituents.

The Liberals have been in power for 11 years and the economic data shows that Canada is in serious decline. Crime is increasing. One in four Canadians is experiencing food insecurity. Health care is deteriorating. Federal debt has more than doubled over the last decade and warnings are now coming from the PM’s own budgetary office.

PM Carney has recently changed the regulations for government advertising so that he can use over \$200,000 of our tax dollars per ad promoting his party’s slogan “Canada Strong”. Rather than explaining the details of a specific government program, these ads resemble campaign advertisements.

If you rely solely on the mainstream media for your information, you may be shocked to learn the following:

Recent court decisions reveal how the Liberals abused their power to suppress dissent expressed by participants in the 2022 Freedom Convoy protests. The Federal Court of Appeal, in a unanimous decision by a three-judge panel, upheld the lower court ruling that denounced the federal Liberal government for freezing bank accounts and inflicting violence on peaceful protesters.

The court found that with respect to the protesters, there was no violence, property damage, arson or threats. CSIS advised the Liberal cabinet that it did not think that the protests were a threat to the security of Canada. Trudeau and his cabinet chose to ignore the assessment and illegally invoked the Emergencies Act.

The court ruled that the government’s actions were unconstitutional for unjustifiably restricting assemblies, using unreasonable search and by compelling banks to share their client’s financial information with police without a warrant.

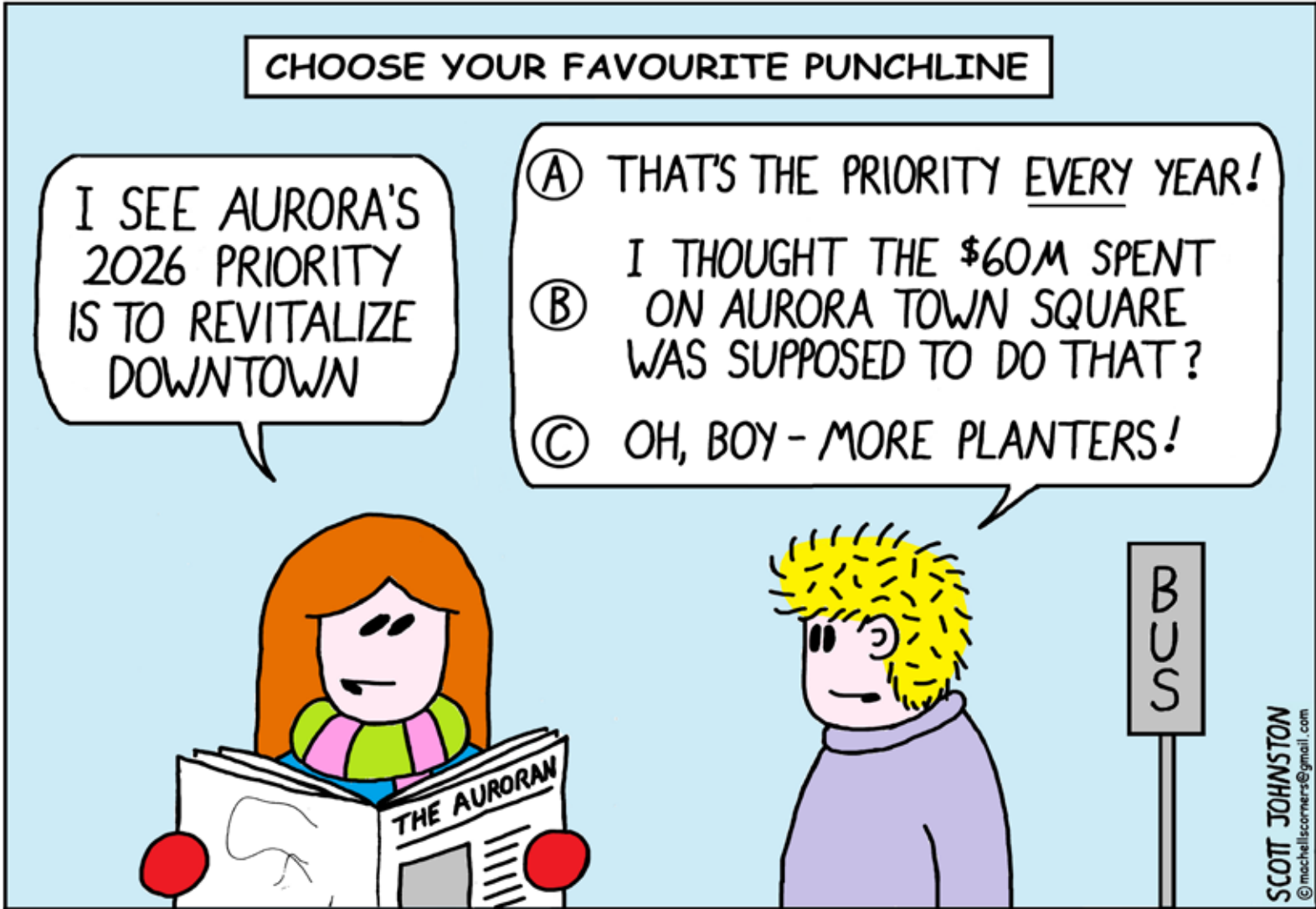
Many members of our current Liberal cabinet are the same individuals who willingly infringed upon the Charter of Rights and Freedoms that are meant to protect Canadians from gov’t overreach.

When Mark Carney was a senior policy advisor to PM Justin Trudeau, he wrote a controversial op-ed in the Globe and Mail describing the protest as “a threat to democratic order” and “sedition” and encouraging the government “to follow the money” behind the movement.

Will Carney now apologize for his knee-jerk reaction to vilify the Convoy protesters, and offer restitution for financial damages they suffered?

Shelley Wister  
Aurora

Machell’s Corners



The more things change...



BROCK’S BANTER

Brock Weir

leading up to this one, I was struck by how many issues that were front-of-mind 10 years ago are still bandied about – creative ways to preserve greenspace, how to secure greater autonomy for municipalities over upper levels of government, community heroes being recognized for achievements large and small, and particularly telling, a trifecta: supporting local business in the face of impending challenges south of the border; community groups and organizations teaming up to eradicate hate crimes and bias within our communities, and students finding avenues to speak out on the issues that matter to them, whether it was through visual art, the written word, or through challenging worldviews in spirited international debate arenas.

“The sights and sounds of Times Square this time around were very recognizable, but there were very noticeable differences,” I wrote in early 2016 about spending New Year’s Eve in New York City and, in a remarkable example of foresight and getting ahead of trends, comparing it to my first NYE in NYC a full decade before. “In the lead-up to the Holiday Season, one of our very own columnists shared her initial plans to also travel to New York City for the celebration, only to scuttle them well beyond the embryonic stage after ISIS released a video their radicals apparently filmed in what was set to become the centre-stage for that evening’s party. I wasn’t prepared to let them spoil the party, so I continued on my merry way. A couple of hours before I set off to take in the action – come what may – I got a text from this individual recommending an extra layer of Kevlar to keep warm. Thankfully it wasn’t needed.”

Ten years on from that experience, and 20 years on from the first, there are different threats in the air and different reasons to consider one’s options when thinking about travelling to the United States, but, for many, that sense of trepidation remains.

Another instance that struck me in a further column of January 2016 –

The first chapter of a New Year is often one of introspection.

It’s sometimes a time to reflect on the previous year as it settles into the history books, and sometimes these reflections help a person set some late-breaking resolutions.

If you happen to have a milestone birthday just ahead or just behind, this introspection can often get a bit deeper; reflecting on the last five years, the last decade, or more.

My own milestone birthday, which took place about four months ago and is barely visible in that rear-view, wasn’t necessarily a time for looking back, although there was some time spent reflecting on what I intended to accomplish by the time the final digit age odometer flipped around to this particular zero, and what should be prioritized by the time the zero comes back around again. Still, I found myself with my eyes on the horizon.

But social media can sometimes make this a taller order.

No matter your platforms of choice, chances are you’ve seen scores of individuals doing the shallowest of deep dives into themselves.

The 2016 “Challenge” – which is hardly herculean in the task at hand – most often sees the individual post a photo of themselves today side-by-side with a photo taken a decade previously. Now, to be fair, many of the posted images in question mean different things to different people. For some, they represent a decade of change and growth. For others, the pictures-of-the-past represent a specific milestone, celebratory or difficult, that were part and parcel of 2016.

For others still, maybe even the slight majority, the compare-and-contrast can even be something of a fishing expedition – that is, fishing for compliments about how well they’ve aged, or otherwise turned back the so-called hands of time in the ensuing decade.

Now, as someone whose hairstyle has changed very little since my father first took me to his elderly barber, a man who began taming his own tresses more than 25 years before, in the 1990s – aside from the mass arrival of grey over the last five years, I didn’t have much visual material to compare.

So, of course, I turned to the written word.

My first step was looking into some of the back issues of this newspaper.

This space here is one of the only places I express my views and I was curious to look back on some of the topics that were on my mind 10 years ago this month.

A cursory flip through some of the pages

accidentally eavesdropping upon a scene that, sadly, is unfolding ever more seldom these days.

“A shared glance. A subtle wink. A short, curt nod. You see these gestures in everyday life. Sometimes you might be on the receiving end of these signals and somehow, instinctively, you usually have the tools at your disposal to translate them into some reasonably useful information. They have spotted the same thing on the horizon. They are in on the joke. You have met before. These tools can often come in handy when observing interactions between others as well. Then there are other times when these tools fail you.

“You are thrown into something – be it a situation, conversation, or another kind of exchange – where you only have the sum of its parts and can’t possibly hope to come anywhere close to holding the whole in your hands.”

One often finds themselves in this situation in this particular line of work, but this instance involved a gathering at a local library when two Second World War veterans who had participated in The Note To Self Project, a book combining beautiful portraits of individuals accompanied by letters they would have written to their younger selves.

Their conversation was jovial and from a short distance away I could hear they were trading stories, but I knew at the end of the day, however open they were in their experiences, these were experiences shared solely by the two men in the room.

The two men, one of whom was 102 at the time, had 200 years of shared experience between them, and the conversation was doomed to be impenetrable to everyone else in the room, but it was invaluable to overhear.

Once upon a time, we took the memories and experiences of people of this generation – and the lessons we could learn from them – for granted, now the chances to do just that are fewer and further between with each passing year. And, simply put, we’re not the richer for it.

It’s often said that the more things change, the more they stay the same – and while that is true on the surface, if you scratch it deep enough, you can see the equation is a little bit more complex.

Comparing selfies, or even New Year’s experiences, a decade apart might be fun, and it might even be an ego boost, but when it comes to deep dives, it’s barely sticking a foot into the shallow end of the pool.

Let’s dive a bit deeper this year.

# THE AURORAN

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GETTING THINGS DONE

Mayor Tom Mrakas

For well over 100 years, Aurora's historic core has served as the heart of our community—a vibrant place to gather, celebrate, shop, dine, and connect.

Despite its enduring significance, past revitalization efforts have been hindered by outdated regulations and unrealized opportunities. Over the past seven years, we have shifted course, making deliberate decisions guided by a clear, coordinated vision that is shaping the future of our downtown.

The most important step we took was investing in Town Square. That investment changed everything. It created a true public gathering place where families, seniors, and young people can come together for events, celebrations, and everyday life — and it signalled that Aurora believes in its downtown and is willing to invest in it.

Building on that foundation, one of the most important planning steps we are now taking is the introduction of the Downtown Community Planning Permit System (CPPS). This modern planning framework replaces multiple outdated approval processes with one clear, predictable system. It protects our heritage, improves design standards, and gives residents, business owners, and investors confidence in what can be built and how.

The CPPS also enables the development of a wider range of unit sizes, making it possible for people at every stage of life—from a single resident to a family of five—to live downtown and experience firsthand why Aurora is one of the best places to live in Canada.

That certainty matters. It means less red tape, better design, and faster, more transparent decision-making — all while ensuring new development respects the character of our historic downtown.

The CPPS protects against uncontrolled growth. It enables us to shape growth in a way that supports walkability, protects heritage buildings, and creates a vibrant, mixed-use core where people can live, work, shop, and gather.

But the CPPS is only one part of a much larger picture.

The upcoming Yonge Street streetscape improvements are another major piece — creating a more attractive, pedestrian-friendly main street that supports local businesses and improves the public realm. And anchor tenants like Slabtown in the Armoury are another piece — bringing new energy, jobs, and activity into the heart of our community.

These are not isolated projects. They form part of a coordinated downtown revitalization strategy that began seven years ago and continues to shape the future of our community.

This is what positive momentum looks like.

We are building a downtown that is more vibrant, more walkable, and more economically resilient. We are respecting our past while planning responsibly for the future. And we are making sure that growth happens on Aurora's terms — with strong design, strong heritage protection, and meaningful community benefits.

This is the vision for downtown Aurora that is already taking shape, and with each new step — from Town Square to the CPPS to the streetscape and beyond — we are strengthening our shared belief in a downtown that reflects the pride and promise of our community.

As we ease into the new year, I hope everyone in Newmarket–Aurora enjoyed a peaceful and restful holiday season. A new year brings a renewed sense of purpose, and I look forward to continuing our shared work to strengthen our community.

Here at home, meaningful investments continue to support well-being and public safety.

Recently, I met with Victim Services of York Region to see firsthand how a \$345,000 Grow Grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation is expanding community-based mental health supports for individuals and families coping with loss. This three-year grant reinforces local programs that provide care, connection, and support when a tragic event occurs.

Earlier this month, I had the great opportunity to visit our local Central York Fire Services who received an investment of more than \$77K through Ontario's Fire Protection Grant to enhance decontamination processes and improve readiness for lithium-ion battery-related incidents — ensuring our firefighters have the tools they need to stay safe while protecting residents.

Across Ontario, we continue taking strong steps to improve access to health



DIALOGUE WITH DAWN

By Dawn Gallagher Murphy MPP, Newmarket-Aurora

care for families.

The province is investing up to \$8 million to support planning for 16 new and expanded primary care teaching clinics, which will connect 300,000 more people to care. These clinics — created in partnership with Ontario's medical schools — will train the next generation of family physicians, nurse practitioners, physician assistants, and nurses while providing direct patient care.

This builds on Ontario's \$2.1-Billion Primary Care Action Plan, and I am pleased to share that the province has now reduced the Health Care Connect waitlist by more than 75%. Combined with expanded primary care teams, new medical school seats, and focused efforts

to strengthen local access, these actions continue to improve the long-term stability of our health-care system.

The second week of February marks Non-Profit Sector Appreciation Week, a time to recognize the important role local organizations play in making Newmarket–Aurora such a vibrant and caring community. These organizations work for the collective benefit of residents, and the professionals who dedicate themselves to this sector are both indispensable and heroic, even though their efforts often go unnoticed.

To celebrate their contributions, I will be hosting a Non-Profit Appreciation Event on Wednesday, February 11, 2026, from 4 – 6 p.m. at The George Lounge in Newmarket. This event will honor the community champions who help make Newmarket–Aurora thrive and provide an opportunity to personally thank them for the meaningful work they do each and every day, for further information call my office at 905-853-9889 or email at dawn.gallaghermurphy@pc.ola.org.

As always, my office is here to support you. If you ever need assistance with provincial programs or services, please don't hesitate to reach out. I look forward to the work ahead and to another year of progress for Newmarket–Aurora.

OPINION

BY DAVID SUZUKI

Renewable energy technologies are improving rapidly while installations continue to ramp up.

Energy from wind, solar and storage is now the most cost-effective and prices continue to drop.

It's more efficient and cleaner than power from coal, gas and oil and doesn't emit climate-altering greenhouse gases. It's available everywhere and will never run out.

On the other hand, as Bill McKibben writes, "Oil is unique in being extremely valuable, extremely dense and hence relatively easy to hoard and control, and extremely concentrated in a few places around the world." He adds, "A nation that builds its prosperity on oil makes itself a target; a nation that depends on imported oil to survive makes itself a vassal."

According to the United Nations, "About 80 per cent of the global population lives in countries that are net-importers of fossil fuels — that's about 6 billion people who are dependent on fossil fuels from other countries, which makes them vulnerable to geopolitical shocks and crises."

Despite the numerous advantages of renewable energy, we're still seeing deadly military battles and invasions over oil. Amid varying justifications, and trumped-up charges hinging on weapons and drugs, U.S. President Donald Trump has openly admitted that the recent invasion of Venezuela and kidnapping of its president and his wife were aimed at seizing control of the South American country's vast reserves of heavy crude oil.

A global peace plan: Stop burning fossil fuels

Of course, we can't forget, as U.S. writer Rebecca Solnit points out, that these are the actions of "a wildly unpopular president doing his utmost to harm the people of this country and enrich himself, his family, and his cronies while in rapid mental and physical decline and in an ongoing panic over what the Epstein files could tell us about him."

Oil, or in our case, heavy, toxic bitumen, is also causing conflict in relatively peaceful Canada, where, as McKibben writes, "Alberta threatens over and over to disrupt the nation unless it gets its oily way."

It's increasingly clear that the hyper-capitalist love for fossil fuels and hatred of renewable energy stems largely from the fact that — unlike wind, solar, geothermal and hydro — oil can be monopolized and controlled, concentrating wealth and power in the hands of a few.

Solnit writes, "Fossil fuel is inseparable from violence, and dependence on it has created a brutal world order in which some states have corrosive outsize power due to their possession of oil and gas while others have corrosive dependency on these often-human-rights-abusing regimes."

No country has ever invaded another to seize its solar panels or wind turbines. It's impossible to embargo or attack solar power sources. As McKibben writes, "[It's] going to be hard to figure out how to fight wars over sunshine." (To be fair, the "superpowers" are coveting critical mineral resources in other countries, required for computers and artificial intelligence as well as renewable energy and electric vehicle components. But oil is still the priority)

One of the best ways to bring greater

peace and stability is to speed up the transition from polluting fossil fuels to cleaner energy sources. Add that to the many other advantages of the renewable energy revolution — from cleaner air, water and land and related better health outcomes to good jobs, more affordable living and greater economic stability.

The shift from inefficient, climate-altering fuels to cleaner energy is inevitable and proceeding rapidly. More than 90 per cent of new energy capacity in 2024 came from renewable sources, and 91 per cent was less expensive than new fossil fuel alternatives. Global investments in renewable energy have outpaced spending on fossil fuels for the past 10 years.

But we're still burning too much dirty fuel, and emissions continue to rise. Heavy crude from oilsands in Venezuela and Alberta is particularly bad for the climate. Despite international agreements and the reality of the climate crisis, desperate fossil fuel forces are doing everything possible to keep the obscene profits rolling in — meaning more droughts, deadly heat, desertification, sea level rise, human migration, health impacts, death, wildfires, unpredictable weather, species extinction and more.

There's no place in this world for more pipelines, more drilling, more burning. We must stop using fossil fuels now, for the sake of the climate, but also to bring about greater global peace and stability. The choice is clear:

David Suzuki is a scientist, broadcaster, author and co-founder of the David Suzuki Foundation. Written with David Suzuki Foundation Senior Writer and Editor Ian Hanington. Learn more at daveidsuzuki.org



# Limeridge and Gateway neighbours call for traffic calming measures

BY BROCK WEIR  
EDITOR  
LOCAL JOURNALISM  
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Further traffic calming measures might come to the Limeridge Street and Gateway Drive neighbourhoods after neighbours made their case to Council last week.

At issue was a traffic calming assessment on the two streets carried out by municipal staff.

Their report found that traffic volume on Limeridge between Gateway and Kirkvalley Crescent and Gateway between Pedersen Drive and Earl Stewart Drive/

Birkshire Drive wasn't sufficient enough to warrant further calming measures.

Residents, however, said that, from their perspective, the need was plain to see.

Neighbour Irina Sfranciog said traffic bollards are needed near the curves where "speeding is most pervasive."

"You will hear that a recent speed study did not qualify Limeridge Street under the municipality's standard thresholds for traffic calming," she said. "You will hear that our street may not meet the typical traffic volume or speed benchmarks, but I'm here to ask you to implement the traffic

calming measures in any event."

Limeridge is being used as a cut-through off Gateway to avoid traffic at Bayview Avenue and St. John's Sideroad, she said, with drivers often entering mid-block. There is also a high volume of delivery trucks in the area, she said.

"This combination creates a high-risk environment, especially given the physical layout of the street," she said. "Limeridge has no sidewalks. As a result, children, families, and pedestrians have no choice but to play and walk directly on the street. During the evening rush hours, especially in the summer, it is common to see children playing outside and residents, including myself and neighbours, regularly place orange pylons directly on the street to signal to drivers to slow down. These pylons are a makeshift safety measure used daily because residents feel that they have no other options. This alone should signal that the current conditions are not safe.

"The speed study does not capture reality. While it does provide data, it does not capture the day-to-day lived experience of residents. We witness speeding incidents and near-misses regularly, especially during the summer months. The risk is further compounded by dense foliage and tree coverage at 55 Limeridge Street, which is directly located on one of the street's curves, and this creates a blind corner. Yet vehicles continue to take the turn at unsafe speeds. This physical obstruction significantly increases the likelihood that a serious accident will happen, and it underscores the urgency for immediate intervention."

Further measures were also supported by resident Michael Annarilli, who said the posted 40 km/h speed limit on Gateway is not being followed, something that was backed up by the speed study.

"This data points a clear picture: the majority of drivers that are not respecting the 40 kilometre an hour limit and the current road conditions do not support safe speeds," he said. "When half the vehicles on a residential street exceed the posted speed limit, that is not a driver problem, it is a road design problem. The speed study shows that 40-kilometer-an-hour speed limit is effectively ignored by the majority of drivers, and that drivers feel comfortable travelling much faster. This puts families, children, seniors, pedestrians at unnecessary risk every single day.

"We are not asking for anything unreasonable; we are asking for speeding mitigation measures that align with driver behaviour, with the law. So, we're looking for speed cushions, as seen on Pedersen Drive, the connecting street, flexible bollards, as seen fronting the school on Bridgenorth Drive, boulevard slow-down signs at a minimum, this is a very minimal cost to the town, on-road slow-down or

max 40 pavement markings, and edge lines to narrow the roadway, and that's bare minimum.... Let's protect residents and prevent serious accidents before it happens, not after."

Council voiced unanimous support for exploring further measures, asking for further input from the Town's Traffic Safety Advisory Committee before direction is given, potentially as early as the end of this month.

Ward 5 Councillor John Gallo said while he respected staff's analysis of the situation, discussions were fulsome at the last meeting of the Advisory Committee and more of their input was needed.

"There are always items when these things come up that are not necessarily part of our protocol but you can't ignore," he said. "My preference is for the Committee to weigh in on this in a wholesome way so that we're not doing this piecemeal.... My preference would be to have the Committee review this with the aim of it coming to Council in the February cycle."

Ward 3 Councillor Wendy Gaertner said she agreed the entire Gateway neighbourhood should be looked at as "it is a design that encourages speeding" and was not meant to be a bypass of the nearby intersection.

"As Michael, our delegate, said, so many streets exit onto Gateway we need to look at the whole area, and I would like to bring it back to the committee," she said.

Mayor Tom Mrakas said residents know their neighbourhoods best and when they come forward with concerns like these, it's up to Council to act.

"I've always maintained in all these instances that when these come to Council, that if the residents in the area feel that there's a need for traffic calming, then I think it's imperative that we move forward and allow them to have that traffic calming in the area," he said, suggesting an amendment supported by Council that the request be approved pending the report and design coming back to Council.

"They know the area best, they know their neighbourhood, they know their streets, and if they're that strongly in favour of it, that we should help them in that regard. These are safety matters and it's important for our communities and our neighbourhoods."

Added Ward 4 Councillor Michael Thompson: "I'm supportive of it going back to the Committee, but at the same time, I wanted the residents to know that I'm also supportive of the idea of implementing some measures to address the issues, and so I look forward to seeing what the Committee comes back with and agree that time is of the essence. I'm glad to hear that it can be accommodated at the earliest possible opportunity."

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# BUSINESS & FINANCE



## Downtown Aurora’s Community Planning Permit system could be in place by February

**From page 1**  
area, the majority of feedback was positive, stating intensification while respecting heritage was the right path forward.

The draft plan was presented to Council last week by consultants Tim Smith and Mohammed Mubarak of Urban Strategies Inc., and feedback from lawmakers was similarly positive overall.

“I don’t have to tell you how precious your downtown is, how historic it is, and how that historic character has been maintained generally for the last century or more, but like all downtowns it has evolved and needs to continue to evolve to remain vibrant and remain the civic heart of your community,” said Smith. “You’ve made some significant investments in the Town Square and in the Museum, and property owners have also made investments in small-scale developments... The Amica development is a very significant change and, in fact, gives us a clue about some of the future changes that can be expected through intensification proposals.

“There’s lots of opportunity in your downtown for more intensification – I think that’s widely recognized in previous studies and, in fact, it’s a key objective of the CPPS and Bylaw to, in fact, encourage development. Our

task was really to look to see how we can actually encourage development, maybe with some slightly more flexible built form controls around height, setbacks, and step-backs, while ensuring that we’re respecting, maintaining that really valued historic character of downtown, at the same time being sensitive to the neighbourhoods that are just around downtown.”

Among the key elements of the CPPS is allowing for 10-metre step-backs above the third and fifth storeys to preserve the heritage facades of the existing buildings and the character of the core, while permitting buildings of up to nine storeys on the west side of Yonge Street, architectural guidelines, and a greater focus on the pedestrian.

“We know how important parking is downtown and needs to be maintained, but it certainly can be reconfigured as part of a future development,” Smith continued. “This framework identifies those future sites, in fact, where in some cases lands are being assembled in anticipation of development applications. It also identifies future potential connections, both for pedestrians, service vehicles [and] laneways.

“What’s the experience for the pedestrian downtown? You want a downtown that is for walking. What are



An artists' rendering shows how Machell's Alley might be re-purposed in a revitalized downtown core.  
**Image courtesy of the Town of Aurora**

they going to experience?... You can see that by buildings of five storeys with just a three-metre step-back above that third storey really does kind of start to overwhelm that historic fabric you have. You kind of see with the Amica development how the streetscape might begin to change if you had more developments of that scale.

“We then said, well, what if we actually were even more respectful of that historic fabric? And for the density that may come with intensification above the three-story, what if we start to kind of push it back from Yonge Street so that historic fabric is really dominant? [And] at the same time, start to relax height limits so that you’re not losing the density, that you can still get a significant amount of new population through intensification.”

The CPPS proposal dominated much of the discussion at the January 13 Committee of the Whole meeting, with lawmakers raising questions about future streetscape designs as well as whether the plan will result in a greater supply of affordable housing in Aurora.

But the overall feedback offered by Council was positive.

“I want to thank you for the work you’ve done on this and listening to everybody here because I’ve seen iterations of this develop over time and I think we’re getting there,” said Ward 1 Councillor Ron Weese.

Mayor Tom Mrakas added that should the CPPS be passed, it’s “building on the positive momentum that we’ve seen” and “another piece” of the downtown revitalization puzzle following the opening of Town Square.

“The idea is to create a walkable pedestrian-friendly area to achieve intensification but... based on a Made in Aurora design,” he said. “I think that’s what we’re doing and that’s what’s been completed here – and I want to thank the team for what they’ve been able to bring forward.

“It streamlines the process while protecting our heritage, which is vitally important, I think for all Aurorans and everyone sitting at this table. It’s why we protected through heritage designation 15 properties along Yonge Street. We want to continue to make sure that this area is adhered to while we continue to see that intensification occur in that area.”

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**Mayor Mrakas**  
Mayor of Aurora

**READY TO GET FIT** – On Saturday, Planet Fitness formally opened its “Judgement Free” gym in Aurora, its first in the community, with Mayor Tom Mrakas and members of the Aurora Chamber of Commerce on hand to do the honours. The new Planet Fitness Club is more than 18,000 square feet and offers state-of-the-art cardio machines and strength equipment, fully-equipped locker rooms, and more. “With this new Aurora location, Planet Fitness is bringing an affordable and accessible fitness option to the community,” said Chrissy Hubbs, Regional Vice President of Taymax Group, a Planet Fitness Franchise. “Our new club model, connected to the Walmart location next door, offers convenient access for Aurora residents looking to stay active and connect with others in a friendly, welcoming setting. We’re committed to helping members of all ages maintain healthy, balanced lives.” Planet Fitness’s new Aurora location is located at 135 First Commerce Drive. Pictured here with Mayor Mrakas are Divyansh, Jaimie, Chrissy, Alexis, Marco, and Marlea.

**Auroran photo by Glenn Rodger**

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# Council questions still remain over Community Permit Plan

BY BROCK WEIR  
EDITOR  
LOCAL JOURNALISM  
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Aurora’s proposed Community Permit Plan System (CPPS), which will help guide intensification in the historic downtown core, received tentative support from Council last week but questions remain ahead of potential ratification on January 27.

Questions on affordable housing were raised by Ward 3 Councillor Wendy Gaertner and Ward 5 Councillor John Gallo. In response to whether or not the CPPS would encourage affordable housing units, Marco Ramunno, Aurora’s Director of Planning, said intensification will result in a “range of unit sizes.”

“I can’t give you a price point now because, as we know, prices fluctuate, but based on if some of these buildings were to be built over the next few years, some of the smaller units within the range could likely meet our affordability threshold [set by the] CMHA,” he said. “Right now, at today’s rate, that would be somewhere around \$550,000 for our market unit and rental would be, I believe, about \$2,000 per month. I think this would go a long way in providing some more available units in a great location that could...get close to our affordability targets.”

Councillor Gaertner stated it was “certainly one of the intentions to have affordable housing here” in an area that is well-served by transit.

“I know that the Region and the Province would like us very much to make use of the Viva and GO systems which are in this area, so it would be great for people who don’t have a car, and I think that is part of the intent of this, to use our transit.”

In order to achieve a CPPS goal of making the area more pedestrian-friendly, the Councillor went on to suggest that Aurora needs to be stricter about the amount of truck traffic in the area and emphasize the original intent of Industrial Parkway to serve as a bypass for trucks around the core.

“We have to do something,” she continued. “Industrial Parkway was meant to be a downtown pass... there are certain things we don’t want in this area, and I don’t know how we would encourage that, but we should encourage that because we don’t want fast traffic or trucks in this downtown area if we’re envisioning it as we are – as a more pedestrian kind of area.”

That, said Ramunno, would be part of

the urban design study component of the CPPS.

“A component of that study is also dealing with the Yonge Street traffic study and some options that we’ll bring forward to Council with respect to Yonge Street in its current condition with respect to traffic and on-street parking,” he said. “That’s a separate study that we’re working on and we’ll have news to report to Council on that this coming year.”

Councillor Gaertner, however, was clear in what she wanted to see come back.

“We’ve never really signed it as an instruction to trucks in particular to take that bypass,” she contended. “I think to really accomplish what we’re trying to accomplish, we should make sure that that Industrial Parkway route is fully used.”

The Councillor also sought assurances that the CPPS had some flexibility in its guideline areas if future redevelopment and intensification opportunities crop up elsewhere, particularly the Bacon Basketware site on Wellington Street, just west of Temperance.

This site, when it was first built as the Fleury Foundry, was the cradle of some of the community’s best-known industries and has long been considered for its heritage buildings, with some heritage advocates likening it to a local opportunity to create something similar to Toronto’s Distillery District.

“Are we going to have a plan for that in advance?” Councillor Gaertner asked. “At some point, I think the property will be for sale. That isn’t to be in conjunction [with the CPPS] but will we be ready when that happens?”

The short answer, according to Heritage Planner Adam Robb, was yes.

“We recognize that the plan before us today does have that defined boundary, but based on the comments that were received from the public meeting, and I believe by Council as well, we want to have a certain level of flexibility where if there are these connected parcels that could benefit from being brought into the CPPS boundary based on adjacency or proximity, there is an open opportunity to allow them to be part of the CPPS when the time comes and when they’re feeling development pressures. So, there is synchronization between this plan that we have and then the neighbouring parcel in terms of their development capacity and framework.”

## Potential “alternative” to Development Charge collection finds support, caution

BY BROCK WEIR  
EDITOR  
LOCAL JOURNALISM  
INITIATIVE REPORTER

The first steps in exploring alternatives in how Development Charges are collected in a bid to make the housing market more affordable for first-time homebuyers received support from Council last week amid cautions from municipal staff.

At issue was a motion from Ward 5 Councillor John Gallo tasking staff with looking into the feasibility of removing Development Charges (DCs) – fees paid by developers to municipalities to account for growth – out of the cost of the purchase price of a home and instead giving new homeowners the option of paying the DCs upfront or amortized over 25 years through their property taxes.

Exploring this model would allow the Town to “be as creative as we can” in trying to make homes more affordable, said Councillor Gallo.

“To be clear, the concept is not to reduce any revenues to the Town, not looking for any other levels of government to subsidize,” he explained. “As we say many, many times, there’s only one taxpayer and that would have to come from somewhere. It’s a concept to try to minimize that or reduce that purchase price to have people enter the marketplace.”

The motion to have staff explore the possibility received the broad support of Council at last week’s Committee of the Whole meeting, although Mayor Tom Mrakas said he would not support the motion as he didn’t believe it would achieve its affordability objective.

“Nobody has the key to this affordability issue, and any tools that we can provide in order to offer people an opportunity, some flexibility on their down payment and costs, I’m all for this, but I’d like to see what the report says,” said Ward 1 Councillor Ron Weese, asking staff for further information on

resources it would take at Town Hall to administer the program, as well as the likelihood of whether the system would actually result in a lower purchase price.

Additional questions were posed by Ward 3 Councillor Wendy Gaertner on how interest fees would be handled if these DCs are amortized over 25 years, while Ward 4 Councillor Michael Thompson asked for further information on American jurisdictions where this model has been put in place.

From the perspective of Mayor Tom Mrakas, some of these questions had already been answered by staff, and given their feedback, he would not be lending his support to getting a report.

“This proposal doesn’t lower the cost of housing. It just moves the Development Charges from the developer to the resident,” said Mayor Mrakas, noting recent conversations with Town Treasurer Rachel Wainwright-van Kessel. “Instead of being built on the price of the home, families would pay it in 25 years as a new municipal tax – that’s a win for developers and a loss for the resident.

“[Developers] are not paying the DC under this proposal; the resident is paying the DC. Yes, they pay it now, but the only person winning is the developer – not the municipality, not the resident – and I might remind everyone DCs in the Town of Aurora for a single-family home is \$41,000, and for an apartment or condo, it’s \$23,000, so I’m not going to task staff to look into this and take a deep dive because I’ve already asked them.” Asked by Councillor Thompson to “elaborate” on the Mayor’s comments, Wainwright-van Kessel said it “just shifts the part of the mortgage essentially onto the Town as this new municipal tax.”

“When you’re actually looking for... total affordability on a purchase price, when you’re buying a property, your mortgage company considers other things such as condo fees and things like

Continued on page 13



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# Aurora’s history in the spotlight for first Heritage Week in February

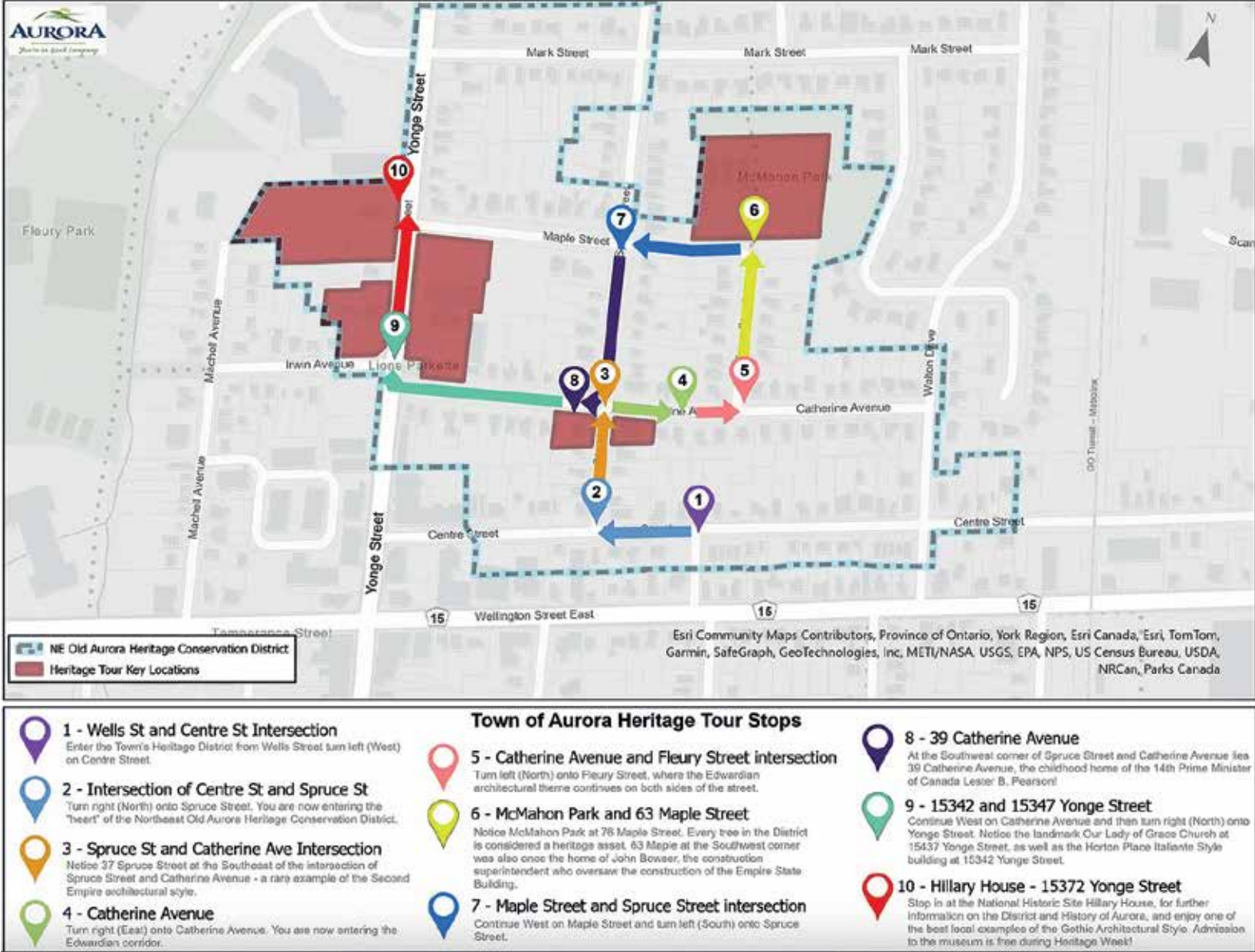
BY CYNTHIA BETTIO  
Member, Town of Aurora Heritage Advisory Committee  
Working Group for Heritage Week Planning

Driving past Yonge and Wellington, east on Wellington, heading to the 404, I find myself zoned out, thinking about which child needs to be driven where and who needs to be picked up and when. I wonder if I might be able to get a few groceries in the 30-minute window that I have between, what feels like, a perpetual cycle of dropping off and picking up. If I play my cards right, I might be able to do make good use of this small window of time that I have.

I suspect that this is a conversation that many residents of Aurora have on a daily basis as we work, raise families, pay mortgages, and curate our lives in this place. It is these conversations that securely place Aurora as an excellent example of a suburb of the Toronto area. It is a great place to raise a family, start a small business, make a home. The challenge is, however; that when we are all busy running this race, we tend to overlook many of the elements that give Aurora the qualities that make it such an ideal place to raise a family - an ideal place to put down roots.

If you are driving east on Wellington, for example, do you ever stop to notice the many heritage buildings that line the street on both the north and south sides? Have you ever noticed the Henry Machell House, located at 17 Wellington Street E, whose family name was part of the original “Machell’s Corners” name for the area prior to Aurora? What about if you ever venture north of Wellington on Yonge Street and happen to stroll past the many heritage homes on Catherine Street, one of the streets included in the Heritage District of Aurora?

The reality is that Aurora has over 250



A map of participating locations and activities gearing up for Aurora’s first Heritage Week next month.

Image courtesy of the Town of Aurora

heritage designated properties, and more are being added every year. While most people think of Aurora as a modern, up and coming suburb, Aurora, in fact, has a very rich history and heritage. Our local history is full of places, people, and stories that are full of historical significance.

It is for these reasons that Aurora is happy to be participating in its inaugural

Heritage Week. Heritage Week is designated by the Province of Ontario to run every year during the third week in February. Across our province, towns and cities have the option of using this week to bring attention to the myriad ways that the history of the people of this province have shaped what it has become today.

One of the major challenges in regards to local history is that when you are surrounded by it, as those of us who live in Aurora are, you can lose sight of how important it really is. It is easy to just assume that these “old” houses are interesting because of their architectural features, or their unique inhabitants, but the relevance might stop there. If you, however, take a moment, you will realize that these properties, and the stories that they tell, are hugely relevant to the way that we live our lives in this Town.

Whether it has to do with the names of our streets, what parks or community centres are known as, or the home that we live next door to, these stories say a lot about why we do what we do in Aurora.

Aurora has always been a bustling community. When the first steam powered locomotive, named Toronto, arrived at the Aurora Train Station, now the GO Station, it was a sign that Aurora was now a key stopping point for travelers between Toronto and locations that were farther afield, finally ending in Collingwood. In doing so, Aurora became a Town with thriving industries such as The J. Fleury Son Foundry which opened in 1859 and The Wilkinson Plough Company which opened around 1868. The Sisman Shoe Company, which moved from Markham to Aurora in 1901 and was responsible for many well-known types of footwear including military boots for members of the Canadian Expeditionary Forces in World War I and World War II, even manufacturing the boots that were worn by the Canadians who stormed Juno Beach on June 6, 1944 on D-Day, as well as the boots that CCM used for their well-known hockey skates, is

another key example. There are countless other industries that flourished as a result of Aurora’s key location along the train-line and the industriousness of the early families who lived here.

It is easy to see that this innovative spirit is alive and thriving in Aurora as we continue to grow into the modern town that we are becoming. This is why it is so essential that we celebrate our local history.

Pulitzer Prize winning novelist Robert Penn Warren said, “History cannot give us a program for the future, but it can give us a fuller understanding of ourselves, and of our common humanity, so that we can better face the future.”

As our Town continues to grow and evolve, what better way to understand where we might be headed, than to appreciate who came before us and what they did? History is not static, it does not stagnate and rot; it is dynamic. Over time, we focus on different elements of said history.

Perhaps we are interested in understanding the role that women played in the local history of Aurora.

If you spend any time learning about Horton House, you would learn a great deal about this. Someone else might be interested in understanding why Aurora was such a perfect location for a tannery, as evidenced by the presence of Collis Leather, located on Tyler Street.

There is something in Aurora’s history for every single one of us. It is up to us to look up from our dashboards, take a few minutes to veer off of the roadways that we use to get to and from where we need to go, and appreciate that this rich local history is one of the greatest gifts that this Town has to offer.

Please join the Heritage Advisory Committee on February 16th at 10 a.m. at Town Square, 50 Victoria Street, as we kick off the Town’s inaugural Heritage Week opening ceremonies.

More information can be found at [www.aurora.ca/heritageweek](http://www.aurora.ca/heritageweek).

We look forward to seeing as many of you as possible for this free event.

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WEEK OF JANUARY 22, 2026

## Martone, Van Berkel, and Johnson lead Junior Panthers to 5-1 win over Bluewater Hawks



Panthers' Captain Keira Johnson, Annabella "Big Goal" Van Berkel, and Audrey "Marvellous" Martone, are all smiles at centre ice after a 5 – 1 win over the Bluewater Hawks on Sunday. Van Berkel and Martone tallied two each, and Johnson added one in Central York's tidy victory at the SARC.

Aurora photo by Jim Stewart

BY JIM STEWART

Central York's top two scorers showed off their offensive talents on Sunday afternoon as the Junior Panthers grounded the Bluewater Hawks 5-1 at SARC.

Annabella Van Berkel and Audrey Martone fired two goals each to add to their impressive offensive numbers this season. Captain Keira Johnson, who put forth an excellent two-way game against the Hawks, added a goal and an assist to the relentless Panthers' attack.

The talented and tenacious Martone, who is second in both points scored and penalty minutes, opened the scoring in the second period while on the PK. With 34 seconds left in Elizabeth Janovski's four-minute minor for head contact, Martone intercepted an errant Hawk defender's own zone pass and redirected it past the shocked Bluewater goalie Zoey McKellar.

Martone described the strange shortie scored 66 seconds into the middle frame: "It was one of the weirdest goals I've seen. I don't remember scoring a weirder one. I was angled right on the forecheck and the defenseman's pass hit my blade and it bounced into the net. It was the product of our forechecking."

The red-clad Panthers' forechecking and penalty-killing prowess was on display not only during Janovski's double-minor, but also during a 5-on-3 that the special team killed off in the third period.

Martone acknowledged that killing off the double-minor was a turning point in the game.

"We're a physical team and everyone on the team takes responsibility for the penalties we take. Our job is to kill off the penalties—many of them come because

good hockey plays were made. We learn our PK systems over and over again in practice. Everyone knows how to step up when a penalty is taken."

One Panther to step up during the PK was goaltender Jamie Sanford who turned aside 29 of the 30 shots she faced versus Bluewater. Many of the visitors' best scoring opportunities came when the Panthers were short-handed.

Martone complimented the steady Sanford who picked up her 12th W of the season.

"With Jamie in net, we don't worry about much. We trust her to make the big saves for us. We want to play physically, so we're going to get some penalties, and Jamie keeps us in games when we're killing penalties."

The only shot that eluded Sanford was an even strength goal that tied the game with 12:26 left in the second period. Jamie Ryall banged in a rebound in a goal mouth scramble after the Panthers' netminder had stopped a series of rapid-fire shots by the circling Hawks.

The home side responded to Ryall's tying goal four minutes later when Johnson sent a crisp forwarding pass to Van Berkel.

The Panthers' speedy leading scorer created open space down the left wing and snapped the puck from just inside the face-off circle—beating McKellar low glove side to restore Central York's one-goal lead.

The hard-checking Johnson made it 3-1 when she rolled off the right wing and rocketed a wrist shot that handcuffed McKellar high glove side at 2:59.

Johnson's unassisted marker was her eighth of the season.

The Panthers poured it on in the waning minutes of the second period and

their tenacity was rewarded with 2:13 left on the clock.

Martone notched her second of the game when she knocked home a pass from Anastasia Trifon on a play started by Briar Deckers at the point.

Martone credited her linemates for her 16th of the season: "We were all saying on the bench that we needed one more goal before the period. Our entire line created the goal—from Trifon's great pass to Briar's low shot. It was the difference on the goal."

Central York carried its second period momentum into the final frame. Forty-seven seconds into the third period, Van Berkel sniped her 33rd of the season when she one-timed a perfect pass to her tape from Abby Pak.

The low shot slid into the back of the net and gave the Panthers a commanding four-goal lead.

Van Berkel's marker earned Pak and Zoe Ordanis their 16th helpers of the season.


The talented playmakers are tied with defender Rachel Talesnik for the team-lead in assists.

As the fifth-place Panthers (23-11-0) head into the 25-team league's Exam Break, their Top Five Scorers are:

- Annabella Van Berkel—33 goals and 12 assists for 45 points in 31 GP;
- Audrey Martone—16 goals and 12 assists for 28 points in 31 GP;
- Zoe Ordanis—10 goals and 16 assists for 26 points in 34 GP;
- Abby Pak—9 goals and 16 assists for 25 points in 35 GP;
- Lily Paisley—14 goals and 10 assists for 24 points in 30 GP;

The U22 Central York squad will battle through a grueling three-game road trip versus the Ottawa 67's, Nepean Wildcats, and Kingston Icewolves on January 30, January 31, and February 1.

The Junior Panthers' next home game is Sunday, February 8 when they host Durham West at 4:15 at SARC to close off the Silver Stick Tournament festivities. The historic tournament's Opening Ceremonies—including a U15 Panthers game—will be Friday, February 6 at 4 PM at the ACC.



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# Hospital hopes to break \$500,000 in this year’s Run for Southlake



Newmarket Mayor John Taylor and East Gwillimbury Mayor Virginia Hackson joined Jennifer Ritter of the Southlake Foundation, Steve Hollingsworth of Nature's Emporium, and members of the Southlake community at Monday afternoon's launch event for the 2026 Nature's Emporium Run for Southlake.

**BY BROCK WEIR**  
EDITOR  
LOCAL JOURNALISM  
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Last year was a record-breaker for the Nature's Emporium Run for Southlake, with community members lacing up to raise more than \$460,000 for local health care.

Now that the countdown is on for this year's run on April 26, organizers are hoping to raise more than \$500,000 through the event – but they can't do it without your help.

Community leaders gathered at Nature's Emporium's flagship Newmarket location on Monday afternoon to formally launch the countdown to the 2026 Run for Southlake.

Jennifer Ritter, President and CEO of the Southlake Health Foundation, said last year's event saw more than 1,650 participants "running, walking, dancing" on Davis Drive to support the local hospital and she hopes these records will be broken in the spring.

"We know that this year is going to be a record-breaking year," said Ritter. "Without the support of our community running, walking, and raising critical dollars to support leading-edge patient care, we wouldn't be able to look after all the members of our community."

"Last year, we raised \$460,000... the highest we have raised. The bar is set. We want to blow past half-a-million dollars this year. We're on the path [to] turning this into a million-dollar investment in the health of our communities and I know the community can do that. I have the utmost confidence that we will build towards that goal and get there

together – because I know how we all value the health and wellbeing of one another."

These values were underscored by Steve Hollingsworth of Nature's Emporium, the grocery store that has been the title sponsor of the Run for nearly 15 years.

Hollingsworth said he had the chance to participate in the Run last year with his daughter and said the value it continues to bring the community is clear.

"Southlake Health is where our loved ones go to get the care they need," he said. "It's a very special place and it's obviously something that we want to continue to support and ensure that everybody has access to the life-saving care they need.... As community members, we have the opportunity with this event to show up for one another in a time, quite frankly... when technology, which is intended to bring us all together, seems to continue to push us apart. There's not that many events like this that give us this opportunity to show up for each other, so we're very excited to continue to support an event that does that."

"We're grateful to be part of something that brings so many people together. We know we're going on 14 years now as a partnership and we look forward to continuing to grow that, to continuing to help provide leading-edge care that's close to home in our communities for years to come."

*For more on the 2026 Nature's Emporium Run for Southlake, including how to register or pledge your support to a team or individual, visit [runforsouthlake.ca](https://runforsouthlake.ca).*

# Tigers squander 5-2 second period lead and lose 7-5 to Hurricanes in Battle of Yonge Street

BY JIM STEWART

Anrijs Bundzenieks and Charlie Hotles contributed three points each and Kian Hodgins made 53 saves for Aurora, but the Junior A Tigers fell 7-5 in a morning matchup with the Newmarket Hurricanes on Wednesday at the Ray Twinney Complex.

The Tigers built an impressive 5-2 lead when Bundzenieks scored his second goal of the game and 13th of the season at 13:03 of the second period.

With seven minutes left in the middle frame, it appeared that Aurora was on its way to a second consecutive upset win at the Ray Twinney Complex this season.

The Tigers shut out the Hurricanes 2-0 in the season opener on September 6 when the former Toronto Junior Canadians played their first game in their new digs in Newmarket in front of 1,086 fans.

Jayden Rhee made 36 saves that late summer afternoon, even turning aside a third period penalty shot, to earn the shutout. Rhee was waived by mid-October and was the first of eight goalies to start a game between the pipes for the Tigers in 2025-26. Following Rhee were Rafael DeFina, Finn Wilson, Matthew Humphries, Owen Byers, Lucas Carpino, Noah Kraus, and Kian Hodgins.

Back in September, Bundzenieks helped ruin the Hurricanes' home opener with a goal and an assist in a game that celebrated the return of Junior A Hockey to Newmarket after a six-year absence.

However, even the good recurrent vibe provided by Bundzenieks was not enough on Wednesday morning.

The third-place Hurricanes (26-13-1-1) hunkered down and scored five unanswered goals to secure the home ice victory. Hodgins did his best to weather the Hurricane blast by stopping 53 of

the 59 shots he faced, but the tenth-place Tigers' slim playoff chances diminished with the tough loss to Newmarket. On Wednesday afternoon, Aurora (13-24-0-2) trailed eighth-place Lindsay by nine points for the last OJHL East playoff spot.

The Tigers had one more kick at the can to pick up points on the Muskies when they travelled to Haliburton County on Saturday night to take on the third-place Huskies (24-11-1-5).

The Huskies—tied with the Hurricanes and the Pickering Panthers with 54 points each—took control of the game early and showed why they are one of the top clubs in the OJHL.

After Haliburton's Kieran Raynor fired his second power play goal of the game at 7:29 of the first period, gritty Assistant Captain Cayden Smith got the Tigers on the scoreboard thirty seconds later. Charlie Hotles and Bundzenieks earned assists on Smith's seventeenth of the season.

However, three consecutive goals by the Huskies—including Raynor's third of the game at 5:50 of the second period—put Haliburton County up 5-1. Raynor's hat trick earned him First Star of the Game honors as selected by OJHL staff.

Javian Nei narrowed the Tigers' deficit to 5-2 when his power play goal finished a passing play by Smith and Bundzenieks at 12:22 of the middle frame.

Five minutes later, the Huskies restored their four-goal lead when Carson Durnin beat Tigers' substitute netminder Noah Kraus at 17:46 to close the scoring.

The Tigers host the Huskies on Friday, January 23 and the Muskies on Saturday, January 24. Puck drop for both games at the ACC is 7 p.m.

A home-stand sweep by the Tigers would be required to keep them in the OJHL East playoff race.



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# Future Grads Focus Their Creative Vision for Mayor’s Youth Art

BY BROCK WEIR  
EDITOR  
LOCAL JOURNALISM  
INITIATIVE REPORTER

It can be a rough world out there, and we need a lot more joy in our lives. This is the view of Claire Thorne, a Grade 12 student at Aurora’s St. Anne’s School.

A passionate artist, finding joy in the world around her and expressing it through her work has been a key focus as she finishes up her last year at St. Anne’s – and it’s that joy she hopes to spread to the wider community as one of more than 60 local Grade 12 students set to take over the Aurora Cultural Centre later this month as part of the annual Mayor’s Celebration of Youth Art. (MCOYA)

Participating students are in the process of putting the finishing touches on their work before curating and installing their pieces at the Centre on January 30 in what promises to be the largest and widest-reaching MCOYA yet. This year’s show is bringing together 191 pieces of art created by 61 students.

“There’s a lot of very personal projects, but it’s really diverse in the way they’re expressing it this year,” says Adora Lau, Gallery Assistant at the Aurora Cultural Centre who is taking the lead on MCOYA once again this year.

This diversity was evident when The Auroran visited St. Anne’s to speak with some of their participating art students.

Thorne says the opportunity to exhibit her art in a formal gallery setting for the very first time was too good to miss, and she looks forward to hearing the thoughts her works inspire within viewers.

“We need to spread as much joy as we can,” says Thorne of what inspires her and helped determine what she wanted to put front and centre in the show. “One of my pieces is about me and my mom making Christmas cookies every year, and that quality of time, as well as just saving time to participate in all of your hobbies and thinking about bringing your childhood whimsy into your adult life because it can be really depressing. Then it’s kind of melancholy looking back on it when

it shouldn’t be. It should be something you should integrate into your life in a positive matter.”

Joy is a feeling Thorne says she discovers in the creative process, finding it calming when there isn’t too much pressure around it.

Similarly, fellow student Zara Martin says she’s found the power in art to foster empathy, particularly when training her artistic lens on today’s social issues.

“I think that empathy is a really important theme that art can help with,” says Martin, pointing to a painting she completed inspired by Picasso’s Guernica, interpreted as a meditation on war and violence.

“Art is vulnerable,” she says. “Having this experience [in MCOYA] is going to be really interesting, being able to see other people looking at my art and the different perspectives that can come from that.”

Lindsay Fu is also looking forward to that “connection” having her work publicly displayed for the first time will foster, particularly with her artistic peers around York Region.

Fu says among the themes that inspired her work for this year’s exhibition include professionalism and the social constructs related to that.

“I kind of use my art to bring about the absurdity,” she says, pointing to a painting of a girl on a toilet with a chuckle. “It’s kind of funny when we’re expected to not talk about certain subjects. I use my art in a satirical way, too. I’m exploring how [through] fashion, you can see how someone’s expressing themselves and going against the societal norms. The way we dress, I feel it’s really confined sometimes and you can’t dress in certain ways because it’s not professional or it’s not seen as good, but sometimes with what you wear can also go against societal norms.”

Similar themes are also being explored by Bettina Zeng who says she “takes a lot of inspiration” from the media she consumes, including TikTok.

“What I tend to focus on is very metaphysic themes as well as societal themes, whether it’s social injustice... and I submitted a piece on the over-sexualization of women in media. It’s



Students Zara Martin, Claire Thorne, Bettina Zeng, Becca Duicu, and Lindsay Fu were joined by teacher Miranda Ly and Adora Lau of the Aurora Cultural Centre. **Auroran photo by Brock Weir**

just a broad range. I feel like my pieces are introspective and reflective as well. I just feel like [it’s important] to question the world, to look below the surface level, and to really question everything you’ve consumed and you surround yourself with.”

For art teacher Miranda Ly, the chance for her students to participate in MCOYA was important because “being able to exhibit art and to show it to a public audience is one of the joys of making art.”

Artists, she says, can sometimes be insular, and it is a “really great opportunity” for students to share something so personal “in a safe space like the Aurora Cultural Centre.”

“I’m super-proud of them,” says

Ly. “I think they’ve really put a lot of time, effort and thought into the work they create. With this program, I’m just trying to make it so it’s a safe space for them to grow, try things, see how they go, and if they run into difficulties, be able to navigate those because I think that’s one of the skills that we really need.”

Lau anticipates nothing but smooth waters ahead as students put the finishing touches on their pieces.

The Mayor’s Celebration of Youth Art opens at the Aurora Cultural Centre on Friday, February 6, with an opening reception from 6.30 – 8.30 p.m., and running through April 19.

For more information, visit [auroraculturalcentre.ca](http://auroraculturalcentre.ca).

## Potential “alternative” to Development Charge collection finds support, caution

From page 9

that, and then they look at your purchase agreement,” she said. “If you’re including the DCs as part of a municipal tax, they’re going to factor that in, so it’s not going to have a significant impact overall on what you can afford. You’re still going to be able to afford the same...amount of house, it’s just a matter of where are you paying those DCs? Is it in the developer’s price, or is it in your municipal tax?”

Tying the 25-year amortization to the property rather than the homeowner, she added, could create a challenge in the resale market and owners would have to be aware of any fees still tied to the property before they purchase it.

Additionally, it could be a challenge for the Town to verify that developers are indeed passing along DC savings to the purchaser, she said.

“There is going to be some administrative burden. It will defer some of the cash flow, but it will be coming in basically on installments over that amortization period. It will mean that we’ll need to issue additional debt for new capital projects....I would be interested to learn about some of these municipalities in the US that Councillor Gallo is looking at so we can do some further investigation to fully understand what he’s seeing, to be able to weigh in further on this.”

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# THINGS... *you ought to know*

## SATURDAY, JANUARY 24

Celebrate the unforgettable sounds of the '60s as John Sheard, beloved pianist, producer, and long-time Music Director of The Vinyl Cafe, returns to the Aurora Cultural Centre with his hit concert The British Invasion! (Two Shows: 2 p.m. and 7.30 p.m., Aurora Town Square) Backed by an all-star 7-piece band - featuring Sheila Carabine of Dala (also playing at the Centre in June!) and David Celia; Sheard brings to life timeless hits by The Beatles, The Rolling Stones, Petula Clark, Dusty Springfield, The Kinks, and more. This high-energy, nostalgia-filled evening is a tribute to the artists who shaped a generation—and the soundtrack of a cultural revolution. Opening the night is rising R&B-pop sensation Charmie. Born in Haiti and raised in Toronto, Charmie is a powerhouse singer-songwriter whose soulful voice and magnetic stage presence have captivated audiences across Canada. A multi-instrumentalist and collaborator on Nelly Furtado's latest album 7, she brings fresh energy, heartfelt lyrics, and undeniable talent to the stage. For tickets, visit [aurora.ca/whatson](#).

\*\*\*\*

The White Heather Pipes and Drums invites you to attend their Robbie Burns Night, an evening of bagpipes, Scottish music and dancing. Enjoy a delicious meal of roast beef and Yorkshire pudding. Cocktails at 5 p.m., dinner at 6 p.m. Royal Canadian Legion, 105 Industrial Parkway North. Tickets are \$70 and are available at the Legion or from band members. We hope you will join us for a great night of entertainment and fun.

## FRIDAY, JANUARY 30

The Pan African Flag will be raised at Town Hall tonight with a special Flag Raising Ceremony set for 6 – 7 p.m. If you missed it last year, you definitely don't want to miss it this time. Come celebrate, dance, and raise the flag with us as we kick off Black History Month in pure vibes. For more information, visit [aurorablackcommunity.com](#).

## SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 7

The Aurora Black Community Association will host its annual Black History Month Gala this evening at the Royal Venetian Mansion. Come enjoy culture, community and celebration. For tickets, visit [www.aurorablackcommunity.com/event-details/aurora-black-history-gala](#).

## SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 14

Kick off Family Day weekend at Aurora Town Square this morning as the Town of Aurora hosts the first of its two-part Arctic Adventure celebration. The fun runs today from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. with a variety of family-friendly activities.

For more information, visit [aurora.ca/arcticadventure](#).

## MONDAY, FEBRUARY 16

Arctic Adventure returns to Aurora Town Park today from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., with a whole host of winter fun for Family Day. For more information, visit [aurora.ca/arcticadventure](#).

\*\*\*\*

HERITAGE WEEK IN AURORA – Celebrate Aurora's rich cultural history during provincial Heritage Week (a nationwide observance in Canada, officially celebrated in Ontario during the third week of February). The Town of Aurora, together with the Heritage Advisory Committee, is proud to host a full day of free programming designed to highlight the stories, people, and places that have shaped our community, as well as other initiatives throughout the week. For a full roster of events and activities, visit [aurora.ca/heritageweek](#).

## ONGOING

Partagez le Français: Ce groupe accueille les ADULTES / 18+ (des francophones aux débutants capables de converser) - qui cherchent à mettre en pratique leurs compétences Conversationnelle en français. Over Zoom with a nominal fee of \$2.50. RSVP by visiting [meetup.com/Partagez-le-francais](#). For more information, visit [www.meetup.com/partagez-le-francais](#).

\*\*\*\*

Support AbuseHurts' Delivering Hope Full Circle Program textile recycling and donation program. A greater number of people are wanting to donate or get rid of unwanted items, increasing the need for more outlets being available to receive the items. This program will provide a convenient way for people to donate or get rid of used/unwanted clothing, blankets, linens and furniture and will help lessen the amount of items ending up in landfills. Materials that were previously perceived as waste will now be seen as a valuable resource further encouraging redistribution. The items will be recycled in the following ways: To be given to individuals who are survivors of violence and are transitioning from shelters into new homes; To be sold in our store; To be sold to a textile recycler, which makes for an ongoing source of funding for Abuse Hurts enabling them to provide their services to the thousands of people that require them each year. When and Where: Monday and Wednesday, every week, 10 a.m. – 4 p.m., with 30-minute time slots – only 1 drop off per time slot. If you do not have an appointment, we cannot accept your donation. The Abuse Hurts Warehouse is located at 1208 Gorham St, Unit 4, Newmarket - rear unloading dock. Visit [AbuseHurts.ca](#) to select your drop off time slot.

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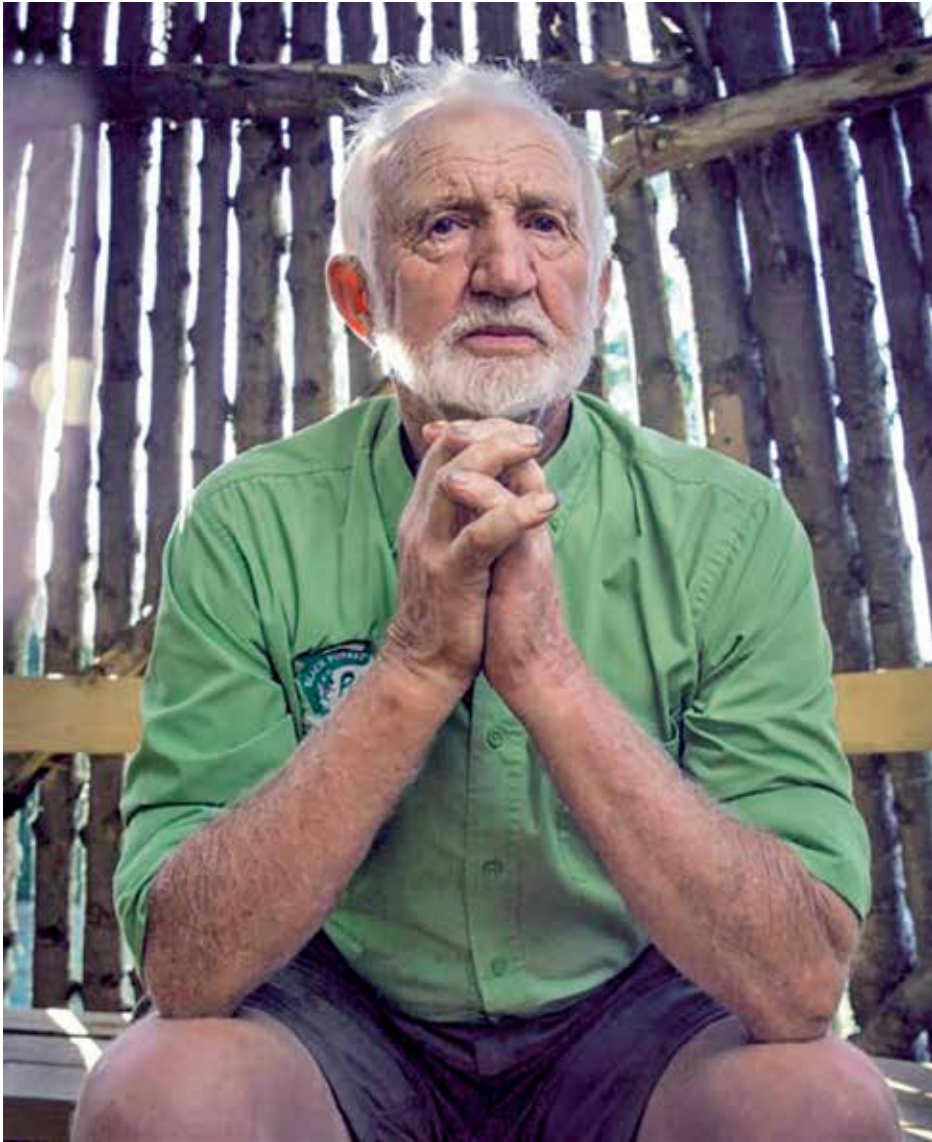
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## NOTICE OF PASSING

# Gerhard Wilhelm KOHNEN



*It is with deep sorrow that the family  
of Gerhard Kohnen announces his passing.  
He slipped away peacefully,  
surrounded by family,  
on January 11, 2026 in his 91st year.*

Gerhard was a dreamer, a storyteller, a philosopher, a lover of song and choir, and an artist who embodied the proverb: “The one who plants trees, knowing that he will never sit in their shade, has at least started to understand the meaning of life.”

A loving husband, proud father, loyal son, brother, and Opa, Gerhard was born on May 19, 1935, in St. Tönis, Germany. The fourth of five children and the third son of Gerhard and Anna Kohnen (Franken), he grew up on the family farm, learning to listen to the land and to use it to bring futures and dreams to life.

In 1962, he married the love of his life, Katharina Gleumes, and together they worked tirelessly to bring those dreams into being.

Not content to remain in Germany and heeding the pull of promise in a different land, Gerhard—along with Katharina, six months pregnant, and their three young sons under the age of five—followed his older brother to Canada in 1968. They first settled in Quebec and, four years later, moved to King City, which would remain their home for the rest of his life.

In 1979, Gerhard and Katharina moved onto an old farmstead on the outskirts of King City, where Gerhard set about bringing his vision to life. Unwilling to sever his ties to the soil, and with absolute certainty in the outcome, he established a garden centre in the middle of a cornfield—seemingly in the middle of nowhere—fully confident that this jewel in the rough would succeed. His family takes enormous pride in the legacy that became Black Forest Garden Centre. Gerhard's touch was everywhere: from the stone entrance he built with fieldstones gathered from the fence line, to the whimsical structures that dotted the landscape—the blue sheep, the walking labyrinth, the secret garden, and forest trails that went nowhere and yet everywhere.

One of Gerhard's greatest gifts was his ability to connect with just about anyone, anywhere, on any subject. With homespun logic, disarming wit, life experience, humour, and endless anecdotes, he offered insight—and often a bit of advice. He touched many lives with his warmth, creativity, curiosity, and charm. People often came to the Forest just to talk. Strangers became customers, customers became friends, and friends became family.

His life was a testament to his unshakeable faith in God, in family, and in the core belief that gave him purpose every day: that life without hope is hopeless.

At heart, Gerhard was a storyteller who believed that the stories we tell are the ties that bind us—connecting the fabric of past, present, and future.

We need only look around to see his story.

And one more thing: he did manage to sit under the shade of some of those trees, even if only for a little while. For that, we are forever grateful.

Gerhard leaves behind Katharina, his beloved partner in life and wife of 63 years; his sons John, Karl (Dan), George (Maria), and Andrew (Sherry); his granddaughters Meaghan, Daniela, and Martina; his brother Willi of St. Tönis, Germany; and many nieces and nephews, all of whom will forever cherish his memory.

A visitation will be held at Thompson Funeral Home, located at 530 Industrial Parkway South, Aurora, Ontario, L4G 6W8, on January 21, 2026, from 6:00 pm to 8:00 pm.

The funeral service will take place at Sacred Heart Parish, 14485 Jane St, King City, Ontario, L7B 1A3, on January 22, 2026, from 12:30 pm to 1:30 pm. Following the service, a reception will be held at the same location in the Parish Hall.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to Doane House Hospice, 17100 Yonge Street, Newmarket, Ontario, L3Y 8V3. For more information, please visit their website at <https://www.doanehospice.org/support-DHH>.

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## OPEN HOUSE

**Saturday, January 31, 2026**  
10:00 a.m. JK to Grade 5 families  
11:00 a.m. Sphere Program (Grades 4 & 5)  
1:00 p.m. Grade 6 to 12 families

**Register:** [www.pickeringcollege.on.ca/auroran](http://www.pickeringcollege.on.ca/auroran)

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-PC Parent



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# New Service Ontario location promises quicker service, longer hours



Joining Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill MPP Michael Parsa, Mayor Tom Mrakas, and Ward 4 Councillor Michael Thompson at last week's Service Ontario opening were Lisa, Eddy, Jia, Ramesh, and Shayla.

**BY BROCK WEIR**  
EDITOR  
LOCAL JOURNALISM  
INITIATIVE REPORTER

A new Service Ontario location near Wellington Street East and Highway 404 promises improved service and longer hours.

The new location on Sunday Drive, just off Goulding Avenue, was formally opened Wednesday morning by Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill MPP Michael Parsa, Mayor Tom Mrakas, and Ward

4 Councillor Michael Thompson, after transitioning out of its long-time location at Wellington and Mary Streets.

"This location will bring choice, convenience, and an access point to members of Aurora and surrounding communities as well," said Parsa. "Service Ontario provides critical services to many residents and families, and it's an access point for many of the supports that are provided from the Provincial government."

From the perspective of Mayor Mrakas,

a revamped Service Ontario, which is many residents' first point of contact with Provincial services, such as Health Cards and Drivers' Licenses, is important for a growing community like Aurora.

"The reality is that [for] most residents Service Ontario is their main point of contact with the Provincial government; it's where they go to renew a Health Card or a Driver's Licence, register a vehicle, or help a family member sort out something important. These are everyday tasks, but they really do matter in the experienced knowledge they want," said Mayor Mrakas.

"This new location is a real step forward – there's more space, more service counters, better flow, and longer hours. All that adds up to shorter wait times and a smoother experience for residents, getting people back to their families faster, and to

the things that matter. As Aurora continues to grow, it's important that services grow with it, and today's opening makes sure that that happens."

Ramesh Gupta, owner and service provider of the new Service Ontario location, says the location was established "to provide essential services that residents rely on every day" and expressed his "sincere appreciation" to the Provincial Government and Service Ontario for entrusting he and his team with "maintaining the highest standard of service" customers have come to enjoy.

"We see this Service Ontario office as a community-focused service point for Aurora, a place where residents feel welcomed, supported, and well-served," he said. "We remain committed to continuous improvement and to listening to the needs of the community."

## Crime Stoppers York Region marks 40th anniversary with commitment to Safe Streets, Strong Communities

**BY BROCK WEIR**  
EDITOR  
LOCAL JOURNALISM  
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Crime Stoppers of York Region began taking calls in 1986 with a simple idea: allowing community members to relay information to law enforcement, while ensuring they remained anonymous.

40 years on, Crime Stoppers of York Region is marking its milestone anniversary with a renewed theme for Crime Stoppers Awareness Month: Safe Streets, Strong Communities – Together We Can Stop Crime.

"Crime Stoppers of York Region began in March of 1986 and continues to be a powerful method of fighting crime by providing the community an anonymous way to relay information to the police," said Bill Snowball, Chair of Crime Stoppers York Region, at the launch of Crime Stoppers Awareness Month at York Regional Police's Aurora headquarters on Thursday morning.

Recent recognition from awards bodies, he said, "reflect the dedication of our volunteers, partners, and law enforcement colleagues and reaffirm our commitment to innovation, excellence, and community safety."

"We would also like to extend our sincere thanks to the residents of York Region for their continued trust and willingness to provide information and anonymous tips. These tips, combined with professionalism and dedication of York Regional Police Officers and Investigators, and the ongoing support of our media partners, form a three-way partnership that is the foundation of Crime Stoppers' success."

Last year, Crime Stoppers received 4,790 tips which led to 113 arrests, 94 cases cleared, 426 charges laid, property recovered valued at \$586,104, 12 weapons seized, \$2,844,385-worth of drugs taken off streets, and rewards approved reaching \$24,900, he said.

"Now, if you were in a business, and whether you look at the tips or the tips paid, I'd say it's a pretty good return on your investment in the Crime Stoppers program," he said. "I don't think anyone would turn it down."

2026 also marks the 50th anniversary of Crime Stoppers nationwide and Dave Forster, President of the Canadian Crime Stoppers Association, said the organization was founded by a Canadian detective working in New Mexico investigating the murder of a young person.

"He exhausted all the resources, had a media background, went public with it, aired a re-enactment, and within hours of the re-enactment airing, information started to flow

in, not only bringing forward the identities of the individuals that had committed the heinous crime, but also solving 13 other outstanding cases. The foundation was born at that time, and here we are 50 years later."

Crime Stoppers Awareness Month is, of course, a time to highlight unsolved crimes and Crime Stoppers announced double rewards for three York Region cases.

Katherine Bergeron-Pinzarrone, 28, of Mississauga is a suspect wanted on a Canada-wide warrant for Second Degree Murder.

"On Thursday, August 28, 2024, at approximately 6 a.m., York Regional Police were called to a local hospital in the City of Richmond Hill after a victim arrived suffering from a stab wound," said Crime Stoppers of York Region. "The victim was pronounced deceased a short time later. The victim was identified as a 16-year-old male youth from the City of Montreal."

"The suspect is described as female, white, 5'1", 120 lbs, brown hair, brown eyes. The suspect is known to reside in Ontario and Quebec. If seen, do not approach her; rather, call 911 immediately. The suspect is encouraged to seek legal counsel and turn herself in."

The allegations have not been proven in court.

The next case relates to a call to an apparent home invasion at residence in Kleinburg on August 31 of this year.

"The victim, Abdul Aleem Farooqi, was fatally shot during the incident," said Crime Stoppers. "Two suspects have been identified, including Amir Wiam Mohammad Abuhamid, who has been charged with murder, and a 16-year-old youth who remains outstanding an arrest warrant for murder."

"Other suspects involved in the murder also remain unidentified. Investigators are seeking information that would assist in identifying and arresting additional suspects involved in the home invasion/murder."

The final case involves the murder of 41-year-old Deuvane Francis, who was found deceased at a commercial premise near Jane Street and Langstaff Road in Vaughan.

"A 2016 white four-door Honda Civic and a 2010 dark Infinity SUV are believed to be related to the murder," said Crime Stoppers. "The homicide unit is seeking assistance with identifying person(s) involved in the murder or who may have been associated to these vehicles around the time of the offence."

To submit an anonymous tip through Crime Stoppers, call 1-800-222-TIPS, or visit [www.1800222tps.com](http://www.1800222tps.com).

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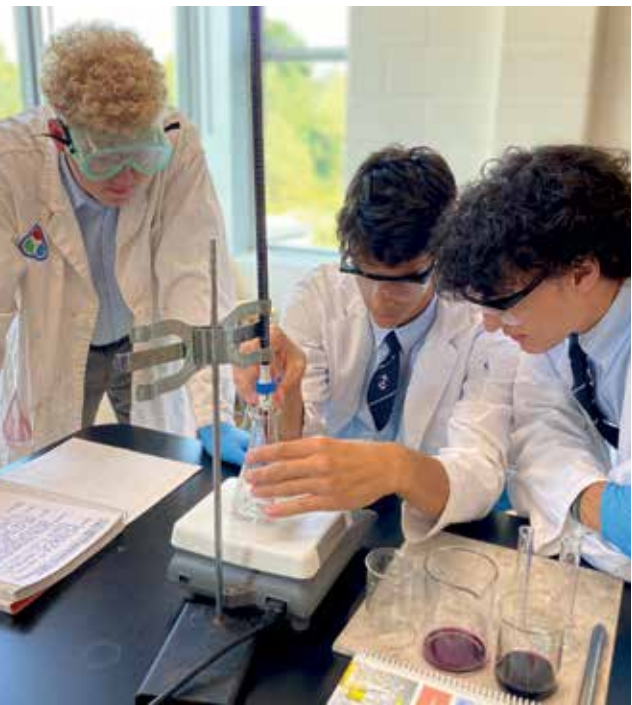
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