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# THE AUROORAN

Aurora's Community Newspaper

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WEEK OF FEBRUARY 12, 2026



(MAIN) Aurora Black Community Association founder and president Phiona Durrant and MPP Dawn Gallagher Murphy welcome Ghana cultural leader King Nana Yaw Osam I to the Royal Venetian Mansion ahead of Saturday night's Black History Month Gala. (Insets, Clockwise from Top Right) The National Anthem was performed by DebonayR; a land acknowledgement was read by Jayden; Dr. Jean Augustine and MP Sandra Cobena honour Lincoln Boyd of the York Regional Police; Mayor and Council were well-represented at the event.

Auroran photos by Glenn Rodger and Brock Weir

## Black History Month gala celebrates community leaders, looks to future

BY BROCK WEIR  
EDITOR  
LOCAL JOURNALISM  
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Black excellence, both within the community and far beyond, was in the spotlight at the Royal Venetian Mansion on Saturday night at the Aurora Black Community's (ABC) annual Black History Month Gala.

The sold-out evening, which featured music and fashion, poetry and prose, a

keynote from former Canadian cabinet minister Marci Ien, and the regal presence of cultural leader King Nana Yaw Osam I, who represents the Central Region of Ghana, was a night of celebration, reflection, and displays of community unity.

"Our people's determination carved out spaces – spaces where we can now lead," said Charmaine Williams, Associate Minister of Women's Social and Economic Opportunity in the Ontario Government,

and the first Black council member for the City of Brampton. "Today, we hear the echoes of the past, but we still encounter barriers, biases, and burdens that have endured across generations, but we also inherit that unshakable determination – the same determination that has defined the Black experience in this Province [and] across the country."

Williams, who is the Progressive  
Continued on page 21

## Keep Pushing Boundaries – Mayor's Celebration of Youth Arts opens at ACC

BY BROCK WEIR  
EDITOR  
LOCAL JOURNALISM  
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Grade 12 art students from throughout Aurora were encouraged to keep pushing boundaries as they were joined by local dignitaries, parents, and art lovers at the Aurora Cultural Centre on Friday night for the grand opening of

Continued on page 10



Richard shows off his artistic talents at the Aurora Cultural Centre on Friday night at the grand opening reception for the Mayor's Celebration of Youth Arts 2026.

Auroran photo by Glenn Rodger

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## TOWN OF AURORA

## NOTICE BOARD

February 12, 2026



## Council &amp; Committee Meetings

Date	Time	Location	Meeting
Thursday, February 12	7 p.m.	Video Conference	Committee of Adjustment
Wednesday, February 18	7 p.m.	Aurora Public Library	Aurora Public Library Board
Thursday, February 19	7 p.m.	Holland Room	Cannabis Retail Review Task Force
Monday, February 23	7 p.m.	Holland Room	Environmental Advisory Committee
Tuesday, February 24	6 p.m.	Council Chambers	Special Meeting of Council (Aurora Economic Development Corporation AGM)
Tuesday, February 24	7 p.m.	Council Chambers	Council
Wednesday, February 25	7 p.m.	School House Mtg Room	Aurora Cultural Centre Board
Thursday, February 26	10 a.m.	Video Conference	Aurora Appeal Tribunal/Property Standards Committee (if required)
Week of March 2	No meetings		

\*Committee of the Whole, Public Planning and Council meetings are available to the public in-person and via live stream on the Town's YouTube channel.

## Online Skylight Gallery Exhibition

Featured Artists: **Akinola Adubi and Andrea Macleod - Aurora Black Community Association Presents "A Moment in Time"**

This pairing aligns beautifully with ABC's mission and vision – One Vision, Diverse Voices: bridging cultures, building community, and fostering inclusion. "A Moment in Time" invites viewers to pause and reflect on those powerful, fleeting experiences that make us ask: Did this really happen? Was I there? Could this be real? Through timeless oil paintings, the artist captures joy, movement, beauty, and emotion – preserving moments that might otherwise slip away. Each piece offers an intimate glimpse into landscapes, wildlife, and portraits that feel both personal and universal. View in-person at Aurora Town Hall in the Skylight Gallery. View online at [aurora.ca/SkylightGallery](http://aurora.ca/SkylightGallery). All work is for sale. Please contact Sarah Reynolds at [sreynolds@aurora.ca](mailto:sreynolds@aurora.ca) if you are interested in investing and owning a beautiful piece of art.

## What's Happening

## AURORA'S 2026 ARCTIC ADVENTURE

Celebrate Family Day Weekend  
Free fun for everyone!

Saturday, February 14 | 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Aurora Town Square - 50 Victoria Street  
Marquee Theatrical Productions Show  
Speaking of Wildlife Show  
Crafts, Pottery Demos & More!

Monday, February 16 | 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Aurora Town Park - 49 Wells Street  
Winter Adventures- Inflatables, Ice Carvings, Activities  
Speaking of Wildlife and Canadian Lumberjack Shows  
Fire Buskers & more!Details and schedules at [aurora.ca/ArcticAdventure](http://aurora.ca/ArcticAdventure)

Some activities are weather dependent.



February 23, 6:30 p.m.

## MUSEUM MONDAYS

Discover the hidden stories and spaces of your community museum in this exclusive guided tour and Q&amp;A, all ages welcome.

Registration (\$10): [aurora.ca/WhatsOn](http://aurora.ca/WhatsOn)BLACK HISTORY MONTH 2026  
COLLECTIVE STRENGTH, SHARED FUTURE

Learn & engage with us all month long

Presenting Sponsor: MAGNA  
Community Partner: AURORA  
[aurorablackcommunity.ca](http://aurorablackcommunity.ca)

## Winter 2026 Program Guide



The Winter 2026 Program Guide is available to view online at [aurora.ca/ProgramGuide](http://aurora.ca/ProgramGuide). Registration is open for Recreation and Aquatic programs. View the interactive guide and click on the code # to register online. Pay in-person at the A.F.L.C., S.A.R.C. or A.T.S.

## 2026 Summer Camps Program Guide



The 2026 Summer Camps Program Guide is available to view online and registration dates are also posted online at [aurora.ca/SummerCamps](http://aurora.ca/SummerCamps). View the interactive guide and click on the code # to register online. Pay in-person at the A.F.L.C., S.A.R.C. or A.T.S.

## John Abel Community Garden

## Gardeners Needed

Grow your own food at the John Abel Community Garden.

- Seasonal plots available from May 1 - November 1
- Open to Aurora residents and Aurora Based Community Groups

APPLY BY MARCH 6, 2026

[aurora.ca/JohnAbelPark](http://aurora.ca/JohnAbelPark)

AURORA

## Aurora Family Leisure Complex (A.F.L.C.) Pool Closure from March 16 to 29

The A.F.L.C. Pool will be closed for annual maintenance from **March 16 to March 29, 2026**. During this time, all swimming activities will take place at the S.A.R.C. Canadian Tire Aquatic Centre Pool.

Please visit [aurora.ca/Aquatics](http://aurora.ca/Aquatics) for revised swim schedules and available swim programs during this timeframe. We appreciate your cooperation.

## 2026 Aquatic Leadership Courses

Aquatic Leadership registration is now open for all seasons of our 2026 Aquatic Leadership courses. Full details at [aurora.ca/AquaticLeadership](http://aurora.ca/AquaticLeadership). Register online or pay in-person at the A.F.L.C., S.A.R.C. or A.T.S.

## Seniors Walking Club

Free Seniors Walking Club for older adults, every Tuesday at the Aurora Family Leisure Complex. Visit our Older Adults webpage for details at [aurora.ca/ActiveSeniors](http://aurora.ca/ActiveSeniors).

## Holiday Schedules

Have fun over the holidays! We have programs and activities for everyone to enjoy. Visit our Holiday Schedules webpage for full details at [aurora.ca/HolidaySchedules](http://aurora.ca/HolidaySchedules).

## EGYPTIAN BELLY DANCE

March 2, 6 to 8 p.m.

Learn authentic belly dance techniques in a welcoming, inclusive environment.

A great workout perfect for beginners and experienced dancers, ages 10+.

Register: [aurora.ca/WhatsOn](http://aurora.ca/WhatsOn)

Monday, February 13, 2026 | 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. | Aurora Town Square

Join us on Family Day! Discover the stories, people, and places that shaped our community during Ontario Heritage Week.

Guest presentations ~ hands-on workshops ~ drop-in activities

[aurora.ca/HeritageWeek](http://aurora.ca/HeritageWeek)

## Aurora Town Hall

100 John West Way, Aurora, ON, L4G 6J1  
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# Valentine's Day, Family Day, Olympics come together for Aurora's Arctic Adventure



The lumberjack show is a perennially popular attraction at Aurora's Arctic Adventure, which unfolds Saturday at Aurora Town Square and Monday at Aurora Town Park.

Auroran file photo by Glenn Rodger

BY BROCK WEIR  
EDITOR  
LOCAL JOURNALISM  
INITIATIVE REPORTER

This weekend is shaping up to be a busy one as Valentine's Day lands on the Family Day weekend, coinciding with the Winter Olympics, but whether you're looking for something fun to do with your sweetheart, make new memories as a family, break a sweat doing something sporty, Aurora's two-day Arctic Adventure has you covered.

The Town's annual Family Day tradition will be spread over two days and two locations this year, with the fun beginning on Saturday, February 14, at Aurora Town Square and continuing Monday, February 16, with a day of outdoor activities at Town Park.

Saturday at Town Square begins at 11 a.m. with live entertainment and workshops running through 3 p.m.

With a focus on crochet, string art,

and diamond art, workshops will take place throughout the day, often with Valentine's and Olympic themes, with registration being taken at [aurora.ca/arcticadventure](http://aurora.ca/arcticadventure), with a nominal fee for materials.

Entertainment will unfold throughout the Aurora Town Square complex from a special interactive story time with your favourite characters from Disney's Frozen, presented by Marquee Theatrical Productions, wildlife and science demonstrations, crafts, games, and a showcase by the Pine Tree Potters Guild.

"Having a program on Town Square on the Saturday and with a program at Town Park on Monday, it enables us to provide a completely different set of family experiences," says Shelley Ware, Special Events Coordinator for the Town of Aurora. "With the use of the Performance Hall [at Town Square], we're bringing in the Speaking

of Wildlife show, we're fortunate Marquee Theatrical Productions is bringing in the show Frozen, and then we have that gorgeous bridge – the way it arcs between the two buildings, there's going to be ice carvings done below outside and the bridge is going to be full of activities such as balloon twisting, face painting, the Pine Tree Potters are going to be doing a pottery demonstration, which is really cool. There are some craft stations as well. Travelling back inside, we're going to have Mad Science that is going to be set up with a science activation. Moving around the building, there are a lot of activities which would be appealing for all families."

Family Day fun kicks off at Town Park on Monday at 10 a.m. with the Great Canadian Lumberjack Show at 10:15 a.m. and 1:45 p.m., two performances from juggler Kobbler Jay, a noontime Speaking of Wildlife Show, and a fire performance from Hoop You.

"It helps to have this over two different days, and it helps that the activities are so different," says Ware. "There's going to be some families who want to sit back in a theatre where they're warm and take in one of those kinds of shows, and then there are going to be other families who want to take advantage of it still being winter.

"We've brought back some tried-and-true experiences with the Snow Valley Mini Snow Tubing run, as well as the Canadian Lumberjacks show – and those shows we can really only have in the wintertime, so we really have to celebrate them while the weather is on our side for those, but we'll also have bonfire stations."

Ware notes that there will be three ice carvings at both locations, with the theme for the Town Park sculptures being the 2026 Winter Olympics now unfolding in Italy.

"We'll be celebrating the Olympics at Town Park and have Olympic and Paralympic facts aligning with our A-frames down the walkway," says Ware. "There's going to also be a specialized activity where we've frozen medals into water balloons, so kids can chip away at it to earn their medal."

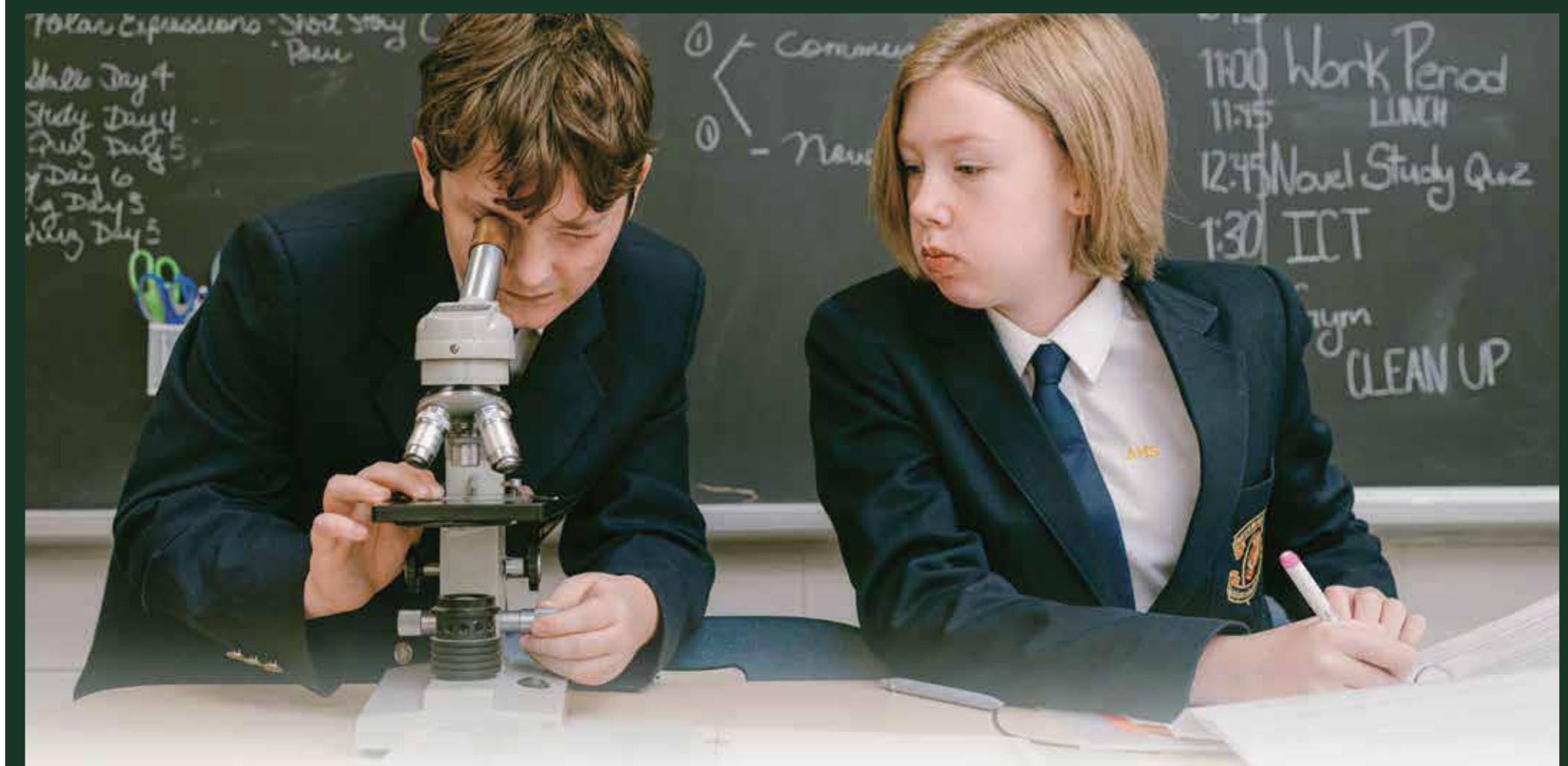
For those looking to still celebrate, but on your own time, the Town is also encouraging residents to take part in their Community Scavenger Hunt, which is powered through the GooseChase platform. It features more than 50 different missions families can accomplish together.

*For a full roster of Family Day activities, and to take part in the Scavenger Hunt, visit [aurora.ca/arcticadventure](http://aurora.ca/arcticadventure).*

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### School Tour: February 18 at 9:30 and 10:30 a.m.

Join us for a school tour at Aurora Montessori School and experience a learning environment designed with care and intention. Tour the school, meet teachers who know each child personally, and see how students work with focus, independence, and confidence. Our approach supports academic growth, social development, and strong character from Toddler through Grade 8.



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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

**Lions Club needs new members to help them roar**

We are reaching out on behalf of the Aurora Lions Club to invite you to join us in our mission to strengthen and support our community. Our work is guided by the following key pillars of service:

- 1. Vision:** Preventing blindness, sight restoration, and improving quality of life for the visually impaired.
- 2. Hunger:** Addressing food insecurity by providing nutritious meals and support.
- 3. Diabetes:** Raising awareness, supporting research, and providing education and screenings.
- 4. Childhood Cancer:** Supporting children and families affected by cancer.
- 5. Environment:** Protecting the planet through cleanups, tree planting, and sustainability projects.
- 6. Youth:** Empowering young people with leadership, positive choices, and healthy lifestyles.
- 7. Disaster Relief:** Providing immediate aid and long-term support after natural disasters.
- 8. Humanitarian Efforts:** Addressing critical needs for the disabled, elderly and vulnerable populations

Becoming a member of the Aurora Lions Club is an opportunity to connect with neighbours, develop new skills and contribute to meaningful, lasting change.

Many of our members find great fulfillment in knowing their efforts directly strengthen the community we all share.

If you are interested in joining our team, we would be happy to hear from you.

Email: auroralions1944@gmail.com

Phone: 905-727-6079

You can also learn more by visiting our website: [www.auroralions.ca](http://www.auroralions.ca)

Thank you for considering this opportunity to share your time and talents. We look forward to connecting with you and continuing to build a strong and vibrant service club together.

Aurora Lions Club

**MPP shares Blue Box update**

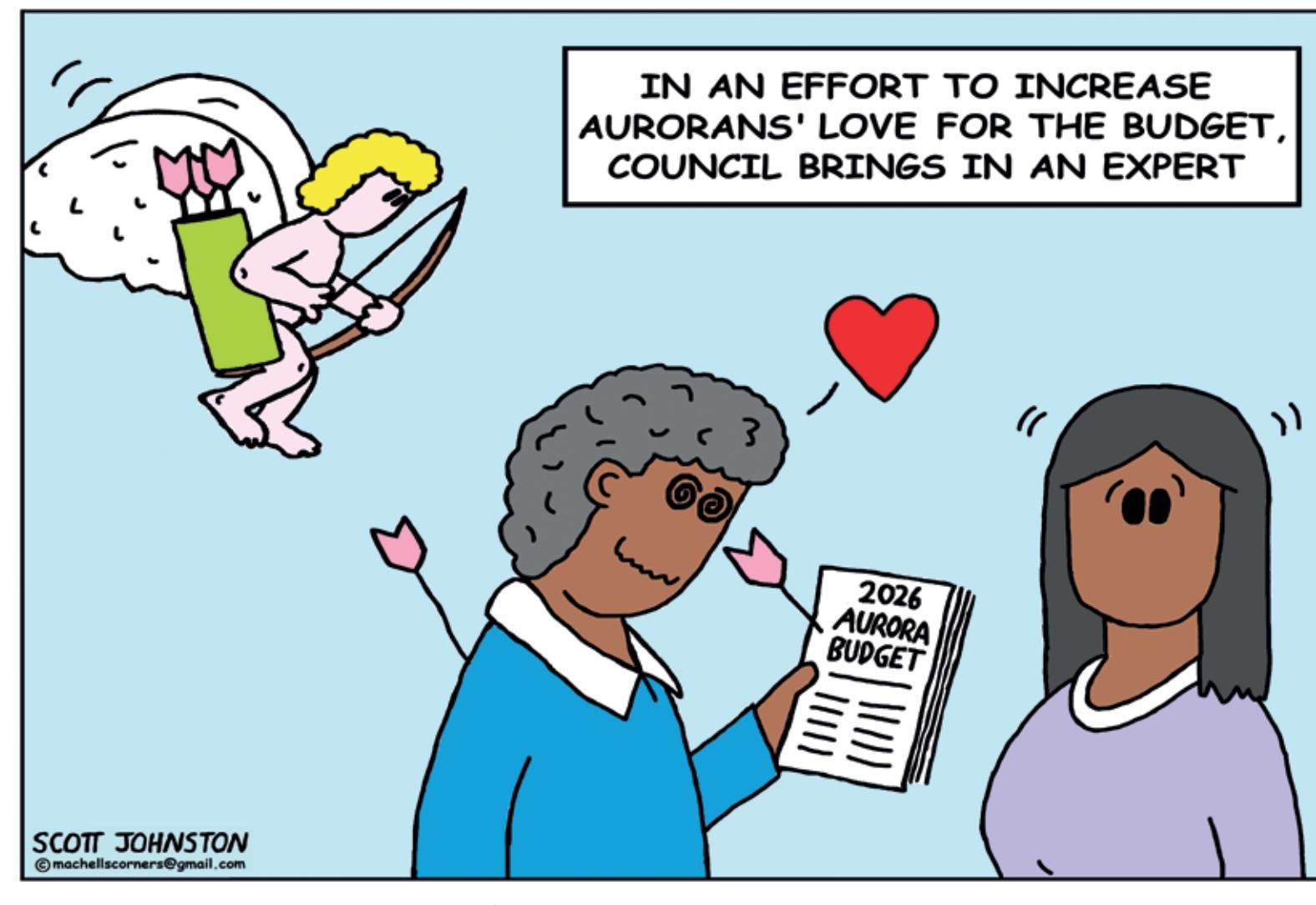
I am reaching out to share an important update regarding Ontario's transition to the new, province-wide Blue Box system. Ontario's new recycling program will save property taxpayers nearly \$200 million every year. Here in York Region, this represents over \$13.6 million in annual savings for the municipality.

I would like to share with you the latest update from Circular Materials, along with additional information about the program.

- As of January 30, 2026, Circular Materials began following up by email with residents who previously submitted a request form to confirm whether they still wish to proceed with their cart exchange.
- Residents are asked to provide confirmation by February 13, 2026. Reminder emails will be sent during this two-week period to those who have not yet responded.
- Confirmations submitted after the February 13 deadline—and any new requests for a smaller 240-litre cart—will still be accepted but will be processed at a later date.
- Once a resident confirms, Circular Materials will follow up with further instructions and next steps regarding the exchange.
- The cart exchange program will begin during the first week of March and will roll out over approximately six weeks.

Continued on page 15

## Machell's Corners

**Whatever Love Means**

February 14 is just around the corner and love is in the air!

At least, that's what Valentine's Day enthusiasts will have you believe.

Don't get me wrong, I have no objection to Valentine's Day in and of itself – it's a chance to celebrate the individuals you love, however you define the feeling.

It might be romantic love, familial love, or even the bond that exists between a human and their pet – and all that is to be celebrated.

To borrow a phrase from the iconic theme to The Mary Tyler Moore Show, love is all around and celebrating it shouldn't be concentrated to one day in the year like so much frozen orange juice they're promising to pry from our cold, parched hands.

Personally, I'd be happy if people spread the effort they put into Valentine's Day out a little bit more liberally throughout the remaining 364 days a year.

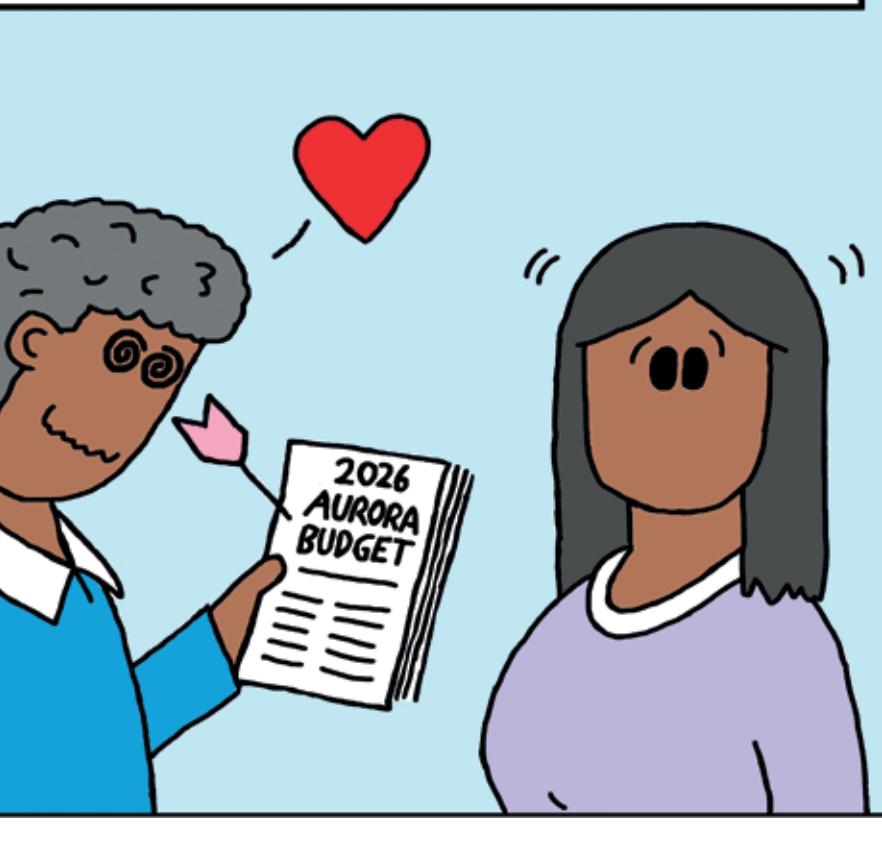
Nearly 45 years on since the infamous engagement interview between the then Prince of Wales and Lady Diana Spencer when the now-King Charles III responded to the concept of being in love with the famous three words, "Whatever 'in love' means," I think it's a valid question in our current context.

Love can be defined in many different ways, whether it's spelled out by a dictionary or a very personal and individual definition you hold close to your heart.

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary has no less than 14 definitions of "love" – and that's strictly its use as a noun; the list is far longer when we add verbiage into the equation. So, in the sake of brevity, among the nouns are as follows: Strong affection for another rising out of kinship or personal ties; attraction based on sexual desire, or affection and tenderness felt by lovers; affection based on admiration, benevolence, or common interests; an assurance of affection; warm attachment, enthusiasm, or devotion; the object of attachment, devotion or admiration; a beloved person (SEE: Darling); an informal term of address; unselfish, loyal and benevolent concern for the good of another; such as the concern of God for humankind – empath, concern or care for others; a god (such as Cupid or Eros) or personification of love; an amorous episode; sexual intercourse; and a score of zero (SEE: Tennis).

When it comes to the strict definition of love, it really can be a Choose Your Own Adventure, but it's one definition above, succinctly boiled down by the unlikely source of dictionary.com on which I'd like to zero in on this week: "active, self-giving concern for others."

While we're fortunate to live in

**IN AN EFFORT TO INCREASE AURORANS' LOVE FOR THE BUDGET, COUNCIL BRINGS IN AN EXPERT****BROCK'S BANTER**

**Brock Weir**



message: unity in the face of challenges presented to us by the United States.

Themes of collaboration and unity were only underscored through the balance of the week as I had the honour of attending a number of Black History Month events throughout the community.

While the different events approached the subject from their own unique angles, they too were united in the idea of unity and in looking forward.

Heck, perhaps it's a sign of the world we're living in where a simple remark by Brampton MPP Charmaine Williams, the Progressive Conservative Government's Associate Minister of Women's Social and Economic Development Opportunity at Saturday night's Black History Gala hosted by the Aurora Black Community Association paying tribute Liberal cabinet minister Marci Ien and her myriad accomplishments was nothing short of a heart-warmer.

For Williams, it might just have been a matter of giving credit where credit was due, but, as someone who actively follows politics, it was a nice change of pace – and sadly refreshing at the same time.

Themes of unity were also underscored by Ghanaian cultural leader King Nana Yaw Osam I.

"We must rise above the voices that seek to divide us and instead embrace the power of unity and inclusivity," he said. "I urge each of you, as leaders and as members of this great community, to reach out to one another with open hearts and open minds."

"Let us lift each other up, support each other's dreams, and champion the cause of justice and equality wherever we go," he continued. "Let us create spaces of belonging where no one is left behind and every voice is heard. Our future depends on our ability to work together, to share our knowledge, our resources and our love. Let us be bold in our activities of progress, fair in our commitment to inclusion, and devote our dedication to the legacy of our ancestors."

"Together, let us be the architects of a new era, one defined not by fear, but by hope, not by doubt, but by determination, not by exclusion, but by unity."

His message may have been framed for Black History Month, but, as is the case with Black history, it's a universal theme.

And we can all take it to heart.

While I started the week feeling slightly disheartened, these instances and these poignant words helped lift the cloud and give me a bit more optimism.

Love might not necessarily be all around at this particular moment in time, but to borrow another quote from Mary Richards, it just might be nearby.

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## THE AURORA MUSEUM & ARCHIVES



### ...are spotting artifacts on the Red Carpet

Some stories are so timeless they are told again and again, bringing to each generation their own view of the setting and characters. *Wuthering Heights*, the 1847 Emily Bronte novel, is being brought back in 2026 for a fresh film adaptation, and interestingly, replicas of woven hair accessories have appeared on the red carpet promoting it.

This original example of hair jewellery from our collection (2001.5.7) features a delicately woven lattice of hair on a straight hair background, with filigreed letters J and S, all behind a curved glass cover. This would be attached, through the perforated edge, to a ribbon or necklace. Hair work like this was often created as a keepsake or mourning custom — an intimate, handcrafted way of saying “remember me.”

It's fascinating to see how a deeply personal Victorian tradition is inspiring contemporary red carpet style once again.



### GETTING THINGS DONE

Mayor  
Tom Mrakas

predictable tax rates in York Region, and 8th lowest overall tax rates across the 31 municipalities in the GTHA. For residents and businesses alike, predictability matters. It provides confidence, stability, and the ability to

plan for the future.

Financial strength isn't achieved by simply cutting back, it's achieved by making smart fiscal choices, consistently.

In Aurora, we continue to invest in infrastructure, recreation, community spaces, and services while protecting reserves, managing debt responsibly, and planning for growth in a measured and sustainable way. This balance is a key reason Aurora is consistently recognized in the top 100 best communities in Canada to live.

As we chart our path forward in 2026, my focus remains the same: responsible leadership, sound financial management, and decisions that put residents first — not just for today, but for the years ahead. Aurora's financial strength is the result of experience, discipline, and a clear commitment to the community, and it's a foundation we will continue to build on — together.



### Senior Scape

BY CHRISTINA DOYLE

*What I mean by living to oneself is living in the world, as in it, not of it.*

— William Hazlitt

of the Canadian and American dollar on a daily basis, who can instruct her broker of what to do with her funds in respect to interest rates, who has an abundant knowledge of cultures around the world and who could probably do quite well at the poker tables. All this from a senior who cannot hear although the hearing aids are supposedly working!

As a sole caregiver, I am proud of my mom who truly surpasses me in general knowledge, banking, and world events. However, as a sole caregiver, I strive to talk about other things, about her childhood, her family, her farm and how life was when we were kids. It is a break from the news and catastrophic situations around the world that she knows too well.

Time is not on my side, although I do cherish the times, we would go out shopping together, having coffee and lunch at restaurants in the city. Today, conversations and visits are short as she tires easily but still valuable time is spent; therefore my dear friends, make the most of what you have today. The world wants you to pay attention to the grief, the suffering, but it's time to take a break this month from such heartache and

As we begin a new budget year, it is a good time to reflect on our Town's overall financial position and the emphasis we continue to place on fiscal responsibility.

Aurora is in a strong financial position today because, over the past eight years, we have made thoughtful, disciplined decisions focused on long-term stability rather than short-term gain.

That approach to fiscal management was tested during the pandemic, one of the most difficult periods municipalities have faced in a generation. Yet, despite the challenges, we protected essential services, supported our community, and managed our finances responsibly — and we did so without dramatic tax spikes or compromising our long-term financial stability.

That same steady approach continues today. Aurora consistently maintains one of the lowest and most

William Wordsworth once said, “the world is too much with us”, a quote of over two hundred years ago.

Just watching the news or the internet can be truly exhausting. This month I encourage you to turn away from the world; it's time to embrace the month of Love. The love of caring for oneself, your well-being, is my hope for you. Be kind to thyself, accept your funny quirks and learn to laugh at yourself. Although the weather outside may seem bleak, buy some fresh flowers today and bring them into your living space. Turning away from the world and toward your own happiness is the path of being content.

In our lifetime we have all been down on our knees, truly thankful for prayers answered as we had hoped. Some were not and some have been delayed and still others have been completely denied. Grace, my dear friends is available for each of us every day. Walk with a grateful heart and please don't worry about tomorrow. Just live for today...no matter what the world looks like in the present.

February is often known as the month of love, thanks to Valentine's Day, but love extends beyond romantic gestures. It is a time to embrace care, compassion and community, especially in the world of home care and senior support. Love is demonstrated through service, kindness, and the simple act of being present for those who need us most. Whether it's ensuring a senior has companionship, helping them with daily tasks, or simply sharing a conversation, small acts of love can make a big difference.

I began this article about being too caught up with the world, and like most seniors who have much time on their hands, most are thoroughly informed about world events. Case in point my own mother, a spry 93-year-old, who can inform me of the worth

spend time with those individuals who bring a smile to your face. Stay away as much as you can from the toxicity of the inexplicable events that you have no control over, beyond our comprehension and individuals who are constantly complaining. Enough already!

This February, to all those incurable romantics, Happy Valentine's Day and to all welcome this month with hope and expect it to be a wonderful month of love and friendship. So, just for today, seize the moment and wear that bright red lipstick!

#### Author Afternoon

Join us for a book reading by author Ted Barris presenting his latest work “Battle of Britain, Canadian Airmen in their Finest Hour”. Tickets are only \$10 for members and \$15 for non-members. Pick up your tickets at ASA reception before they are all gone!

#### Indoor Giant Garage Sale — April 26th, 2026

Mark your calendars for this popular, exciting event! We count on donations from members and the community to make this sale a success. We will be accepting items closer to the sale date so more news to come.

For more information on the Aurora Seniors' Centre and all it has to offer, drop by 90 John West Way, visit the web site [www.auroraseniors.ca](http://www.auroraseniors.ca), or call 905-726-4767 between 9 a.m. and 4 p.m. Monday to Friday.

The monthly Seniors Association bulletin is posted on our web site so for all the details on Association activities, clubs, events, bistro lunches, sports, and movies to mention a few, and town programs, trips and other valuable information concerning the Aurora Seniors Association, take a look at [www.auroraseniors.ca](http://www.auroraseniors.ca)!



## INSIDE AURORA

Scott Johnston

### Groundhog Daze

It was a beautiful but brisk day in the arboretum in early February. Wandering the paths, and thinking of warmer weather, I spied a figure sitting on a bench who I hadn't seen in ages; Aurora Annie, our Town's weather prognosticating groundhog.

Brushing away a bit of snow, I took a seat beside her.

“So, it was Groundhog Day earlier this week. Are you happy with your prediction this year?” I asked, before adding, “And what was your forecast, anyway? A long winter? An early spring? I don't remember hearing about it.”

“That's because I didn't make one!” she sighed, slumping forward visibly.

“No prediction? Why not? You make one every year. Didn't you wake up in time?”

“Of course I did,” she fumed. “I always get up bright and early on February 2<sup>nd</sup>. It's the biggest day on the groundhog calendar.”

“So ...”

“So, when I went to pop my head out of my burrow to look for my shadow, I discovered my home was completely buried in snow. By the time I managed to dig myself out, it was the next day.”

“It took that long?”

“There was a ton of snow!” she exclaimed, indicating the piles of the white stuff around us. “And it had been accumulating all winter.”

“Besides,” she said, holding her tiny arm up next to mine, “it's also a matter of scale. I'm not as big as you. It makes for a lot more shovelling.”

“That makes sense,” I conceded. “So why didn't you just make a prediction on the 3rd?” I asked.

“That's not how Groundhog Day works! You can't make a prediction the next day,” she said in exasperation. “By then all the other groundhogs will have made theirs. It'll look like I just copied them. Think what that would do to my reputation!”

“Also, we all have to get along, and I don't want to rub anyone the wrong way. Wiarton Willie,” she confided, “is very possessive about his forecast.”

“I guess that makes sense. But there seems to be more snow each winter,” I observed. “What if this happens again next year – will you buy a snowblower?”

“I've checked. Unfortunately, they don't sell them in my size anywhere around here.”

“How about getting up earlier to get a head start on the shovelling?”

“And forgo my beauty sleep? Not a chance! No, I've got another plan,” she said. “I'm going to sign up for the Town's windrow clearing program.”

“Isn't that just for clearing the piles of snow at the end of driveways?”

“Normally, yes,” she admitted. “But I figure if they can dig out all those driveways all winter, the least they can do is clear my burrow once at the beginning of February.”

“After all,” she said, “people expect a local prediction. Our Town's honour is at stake. They may even give me a discount!”, she concluded with a smile.

With that she hopped off the bench and waving goodbye, made her way up the path.

It was an interesting idea, but watching her disappear around a corner, I wasn't sure whether the Town would go for her proposal, let alone at a discounted price.

But then, it is an election year, and stranger things have happened in Aurora.

Feel free to e-mail Scott at:  
[machellscorners@gmail.com](mailto:machellscorners@gmail.com)



## Ontario's new recycling program will save property taxpayers \$200 million a year.

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**DAWN GALLAGHER MURPHY**

MPP for Newmarket-Aurora

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# Ontario's New Blue Box Recycling Program: What Residents of Newmarket-Aurora Need to Know

BY DAWN GALLAGHER MURPHY  
MPP, NEWMARKET-AURORA

Ontario is transitioning to a new, province-wide Blue Box recycling system that is expected to save property taxpayers nearly \$200 million each year. In the municipality of York Region, this shift will amount to more than \$13.6 million in annual savings. The updated system aims to provide a more efficient and consistent approach to recycling while allowing municipal funds to be directed toward other local priorities.

As part of this transition, Circular Materials began contacting residents on January 30, 2026, to reconfirm cart exchange requests previously submitted. Residents are asked to confirm whether they still wish to proceed no

later than February 13, 2026, and reminder emails are being issued to those who have not yet responded. Any confirmations received after that date, along with new requests for smaller 240-litre carts, will be processed later in the year. Once confirmations are received, Circular Materials will provide residents with instructions on the next steps. The cart exchange rollout is scheduled to begin in the first week of March and will continue for approximately six weeks, with most exchanges anticipated in early March.

The new Blue Box system is based on a full producer-responsibility model, meaning producers will be required to design, operate, and fund the entirety of the recycling system. This change will bring a single, standardized

program across Ontario, allow more types of materials to be accepted for recycling, and eliminate municipal costs associated with Blue Box services.

During the transition, which affects more than five million households, some communities have reported temporary challenges. These have included delayed collection, changes to bin size or pick-up frequency, slower delivery of new recycling carts, limited clarity regarding collection schedules, and occasional weather-related disruptions. Circular Materials has stated that it is working to address these issues by clearing existing service backlogs, increasing customer service capacity, offering smaller bin options where required, and improving communication with residents.

Residents experiencing issues with their Blue Box service are encouraged to first contact their local service provider, where the majority of collection problems can be resolved most efficiently. Contact information for local providers is available on the Circular Materials website at [www.circularmaterials.ca/resident-provinces/ontario/](http://www.circularmaterials.ca/resident-provinces/ontario/). If issues remain unresolved, residents may reach out directly to the Circular Materials Resident Relations Team by emailing [customerservice@circularmaterials.ca](mailto:customerservice@circularmaterials.ca) or calling 1-877-667-2626. As always, my constituency office is here to help; if residents are experiencing ongoing challenges or require support navigating the process, we can assist in connecting them to the appropriate contacts.

## Aurora investigates measures to steer developments in south end

BY BROCK WEIR  
EDITOR  
LOCAL JOURNALISM  
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Builds on Yonge Street south of the CN Rail bridge could be built under closer scrutiny following a Council motion at its most recent meeting.

Council directed staff to study defining the Yonge Street South corridor's "boundaries, appropriate densities, unit permissions, building heights, built form and transitions to nearby low-density neighbourhoods" with an eye of bringing back recommendations for "clear development parameters and any required Official Plan Amendments for this area."

The move was part of a motion brought forward by Ward 4 Councillor Michael Thompson also calling for an Interim Control Bylaw (ICBL) to be placed on the area while the Town undertook the study.

While Council was supportive of the study, the ICBL raised questions and concerns around the Council table and was ultimately defeated.

Critics argued that the area was already reviewed as part of Aurora's latest Official Plan (OP) and putting an ICBL in place could undermine the principles of the OP.

"Our OP is one of the Town's primary tools for shaping development and managing growth," said Councillor Thompson at last week's meeting. "It sets out our long-term vision, the principles behind the vision, and the policy Council relies on to evaluate whether change is appropriate, compatible, and in the public's best interest. Those aren't my words, they are the words we, as Council approved and embedded in our OP."

"I brought forward this motion today because I do not believe we have that clarity when it comes to the development along the Regional corridor, particularly where it intersects with the intent and fundamental principles of the Yonge Street South Secondary Plan, commonly referred to as OPA

34."

"We have detailed, carefully crafted policies in OPA 34," he continued. "There is no ambiguity for estate residential, cluster residential, suburban residential lands. We need the same degree of clarity in the regional corridor. Our Official Plan explicitly allows Council to revisit policies when issues arise during implementation, especially when conflicts emerge that were not anticipated.

This is exactly the situation we are facing today. This motion does not pre-judge outcomes or undermine growth and development. It simply allows us to do what good planning requires: step back, work with the community and stakeholders, reconcile conflicting policies, and provide clear direction on what development along Yonge Street South should look like. That clarity is essential for residents, for applicants, for staff, and for this Council."

But Ward 5 Councillor John Gallo described the ICBL as "one of the strongest and most disruptive tools" available to a municipality, which should give people "pause." Moreover, he said an ICBL over land already covered under the recent OP "sends a troubling message that we lack confidence in the planning framework that we ourselves just approved."

"Aurora, like every municipality in Ontario, is under increased pressure to deliver housing, not just in theory, but in practice," said Councillor Gallo. "Strategic corridors like Yonge Street are specifically identified to accommodate growth in a way that is transit-supportive and responsible, rather than pushing development into stable neighborhoods or greenfield areas. Freezing development in a designated intensification corridor, even temporarily, works directly against our housing targets. It delays units that are already planned within an approved policy framework and introduces uncertainty at a time when predictability is essential to actually deliver housing."

Similar opposition came from Ward 2 Councillor Rachel Gilliland, who said the Town spent "a lot of money" to develop the OP to "determine what our Yonge Street corridor is going to look like," and was opposed to "halting development on one of the most major corridors in our Town."

"We have tools like zoning, the holding provisions, the site plan control, the urban design guidelines – so for us to come in in such a short period of time and put an ICBL in place so soon after the Official Plan, it sends a message that we're really unsure about our growth framework that we just approved. To me, that has implications on our credibility, certainty and potential appeals. If the issue is clarity rather than direction, I think we have better tools, and that's what I'm looking for."

Director of Development Marco Ramunno noted that there are just two active applications the ICBL would impact, which still had a way to go before being shovel-ready.

Ward 1 Councillor Ron Weese said that he agreed the size and the depth of what's defined as the Regional Corridor needs further definition.

"The Region approved these corridors along Regional roads to stimulate increased density for all the right reasons – to increase housing supply, of course, but the corridor needs to be better defined, in my opinion," he said. "I believe the issues surrounding the Regional corridors have to be better interpreted. We've had issues where part of an application is within a corridor and part of it is out, and it's left to Council to make these judgements in the best interests of the residents in the area, as well as the community at large."

He noted ICBLs have been "criticized when they've been used to unduly restrict development, and it's known to restrict housing supply and it freezes construction."

"Certainly, I don't take an ICBL lightly," added Ward 6 Councillor Harold Kim. "We don't use it often, but we did use it in 2018 during our

discussions on Stable Neighbourhoods. We also used it when we were having a discussion on 1289 Leslie and Wellington. I would submit that we used the Interim Control Bylaw for the benefit of the Town in those two situations and we had beneficial results.

"I do agree that it hasn't been long since we confirmed the Official Plan, but just because we spent a lot of time and we confirmed a plan or a policy, it doesn't mean that we can't go back and review it because I consider all policies or plans a living document that we revise from time to time when it's needed. For us to not review something when we have identified that it might need another look, I think it would be irresponsible to just not do anything just because we just confirmed it a year or two ago, or any policy for that matter."

Mayor Tom Mrakas noted further examples of interim control bylaws in recent years.

"The study is frankly much needed as I think everyone agrees around this table, but to move forward and do a study without implementing an interim control bylaw, having that pause in place, what you do is you create an atmosphere where applicants are going to come rushing to the Town to put in applications before the study is completed so they can get in before the new parameters are set forth in the OP and updated," said Mayor Mrakas.

"When we deal with these applications and we're in the midst of making changes, we say that, 'Well, we're looking at this, we're studying this area, we need some more time. So, we would like you to come back to another Public Planning [meeting] or we would like to take some more time while we finish this.' What do they do? They go straight to the tribunal. You're going to have more and more applications going straight to the tribunal without putting the pause in."

**NOTE: An earlier version of the story, which appeared in February 5's print edition, stated both portions of the Motion were approved by Council, rather than just the study. We regret the error**

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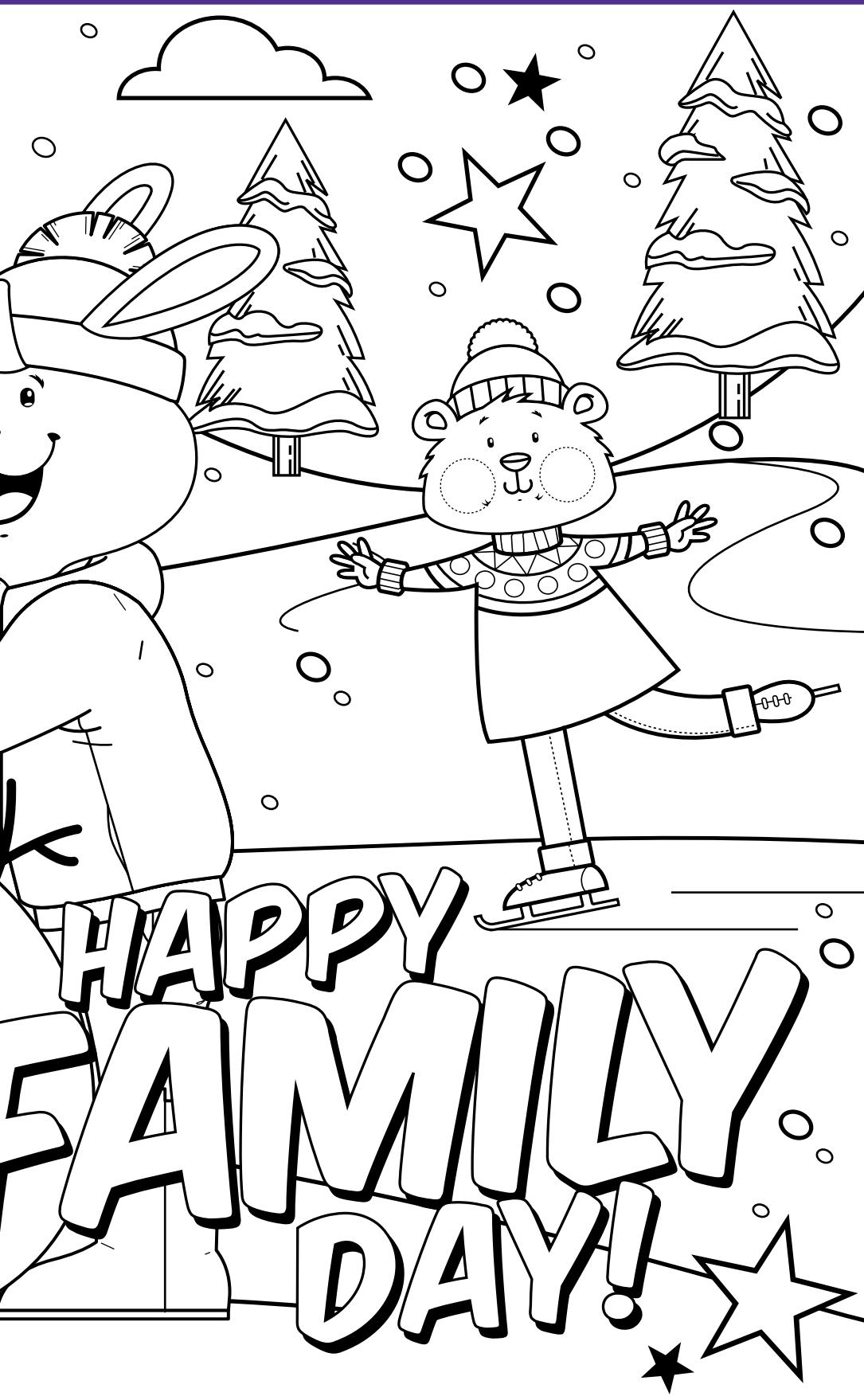
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February 23rd, 2026. The winner will be contacted on Monday, February 23rd, 2026, in the February 26th, 2026 issue of The Auroran. Must be 12 years old or younger to enter. Publishing Corp. are not eligible to win.

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# Arts & Culture



(Left and Right) Emma and Marko were among the artists in the spotlight as the Mayor's Celebration of Youth Arts 2026 opened on Friday night. Participating in the opening ceremonies (Centre) were MPP Michael Parsa, Aurora Cultural Centre Gallery Manager Samantha Jones, Aurora Cultural Centre Executive Director Suzanne Haines, and Mayor Tom Mrakas. **Auroran photos by Glenn Rodger**

## "Keep Pushing Boundaries" Mayor's Celebration of Youth Arts opens at ACC

From page 1

the Mayor's Celebration of Youth Arts 2026.

On now through April 19, the Mayor's Celebration of Youth Arts (MCOYA) has brought together more than 200 works produced by more than 65 Grade 12 students from Aurora High School, Cardinal Carter Catholic High School, Dr. G.W. Williams Secondary School, ESC Renaissance, St. Maximilian Kolbe Catholic High School, St. Andrew's College and, for the first time this year, St. Anne's School.

The Mayor's Celebration of Youth Arts was established by the Aurora Cultural Centre in 2011, its second year of operation, and has been a mainstay each year, whether at the Cultural Centre itself, Town Hall during the construction of Aurora Town Square, or

virtually during the Global Pandemic.

"Throughout those years, we've seen so many incredible pieces line the walls, at Town Hall, and now here at Town Square. This year, over 200 pieces... by more than 65 students will become part of that legacy," said Mayor Tom Mrakas at Friday night's grand opening reception. "I had the opportunity to meet many of these wonderful students last Friday as the artwork was being installed. I'm so encouraged by how smart, talented and thoughtful they are. It gives me great hope for the future, and how extremely honoured and proud I am of the talent right here in Aurora."

Mayor Mrakas was joined at the reception by Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill MPP Michael Parsa, Newmarket-Aurora MPP Dawn Gallagher Murphy, and Ward 3

Councillor Wendy Gaertner who each mingled with the students and engaged with them on their work.

"The truth is Aurora really is a Town that values arts and culture, because we know how deeply it enriches our lives," he continued. "Art brings people together. It helps us see the world in new ways. It can challenge us, move us, and even shape society itself. I know many of our students are preparing for the next chapter — graduating, pursuing further education, exploring career opportunities, and I do want to leave you with this: No matter where life takes you, I hope you keep creating. Keep pushing boundaries. Keep using art to express yourself and share your voice with the world."

"To the teachers and parents of these young artists, thank you. Thank you for fostering their creativity and giving them the support that they need to thrive."

These sentiments were echoed by Rossy Bustamente of ROCA Financial Solutions, Sun Life, who was among the event sponsors.

She told students she was a fashion designer by profession before moving into the financial realm, and drew parallels between being an artist and a financial professional.

"Art and finance are ultimately about people. They are about identity, confidence, and possibility. I am deeply passionate about supporting community," she said. "I began my career when I was 27 years old. And everything I have been able to achieve is thanks to all my mentors and sponsors that supported me along the way."

"Giving back is my way of paying forward. When we support art, we support expression, confidence, and future possibilities, especially for our youth. The Aurora Cultural Centre exists for the community, and it has created this beautiful space where young artists can be seen, heard, and

celebrated. That is priceless. We are fortunate to have this venue in our community... I am in the business of helping people build financial stability and confidence in their future, and I see this exhibition as the beginning of that journey for these young artists. Confidence starts when we are able to express who we are, and stability begins when someone believes in our potential. To the students whose work we are celebrating tonight, your creativity matters. Your voice matters. And the courage that it takes to show your work, your art, to the world, it's something to be proud of."

Artists featured in this year's MCOYA include Cassandra Almeida, Gabrielle Awoyemi, Sophie Baruco, Chloe Bell, Arya Boodhai, Alexis Bowen, Julia Burnett, Xinyu Chen, Ellie Cheng, Tristin Coleman, Sarah Costa-Whitford, Olivia Crescenzi, Alex Daleman, Lauren Dalton, Emma Dench, Becca Duicu, Tristan Dunlap, Sanabria, Maggie Elserafy, Meredith Emerson, Neta Erlich, Adalia Fadelli, Arshida Farhadnia, Lindsay Fu, Evangeline Giaprakis, Raha Givehchi, Ava Gray, Jessica Huang, Liza Kaplun, Sally Keita, Rita Konyukhova, Eric Lin, Felix Lu, Oneli Maliduwapatirana, Zara Martin, Hailey Mason, Adaya Mongelli, Tannaz Motamedrad, Nafissa Muller, Maria T. Nardi, Alissa Nicole, Ava Panzini, Sammy Park, Yuna Park, Sienna Pennington, Mirko Privitera, Alyssa Quattrocchi, Owen Shen, Nathan Skrzyniak, Kate Smith, Mikaela Solaryk, Sara Spinola, Hannah Stewart, Claire Thorne, Victoria Tope, Allie Torraville, Lylia Tran, Brigitte Turchiaro, Catherine Wang, Leon Wang, Richard Wang, Aiyane Wong, Maddy Wong, J Murray Xiong, Jason Yip, and Bettina Zeng.

For more information about this year's Mayor's Celebration of Youth Arts, including upcoming events associated with the show, visit [auroraculturalcentre.ca/mcoya26](http://auroraculturalcentre.ca/mcoya26).

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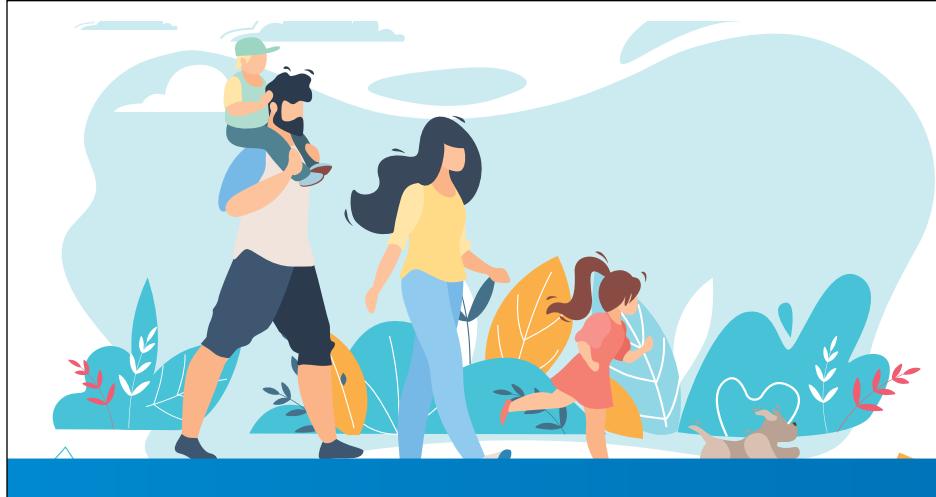
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# Victoria Hall refurbishment costs could rise \$1.7 million

Addition, new floors planned for heritage building



An artist's rendering depicts the proposed new addition to the back of historic Victoria Hall, which, if approved by Council, will replace the current extension which does not meet accessibility requirements.

Image courtesy of the Town of Aurora

BY BROCK WEIR  
EDITOR  
LOCAL JOURNALISM  
INITIATIVE REPORTER

A new addition to the rear of Victoria Hall and new flooring to remove dry rot are among the drivers that could lead to a significant budget increase to make the venerable building a community hub once again.

Council this week will consider a recommendation from staff to increase the previously budgeted \$500,000 refurbishment plan by \$1,682,000, proposed to be funded from reserves.

First built in 1883, Victoria Hall, which sits on the southwest corner of Mosley and Victoria Streets began life

as a church before being converted to a school, spending 20 years as a public library, and has since been used as a community space.

While it has been largely used for storage and occasional community meetings in recent years, the Town began looking for tenants to breathe new life into the space in 2024.

In order for a new chapter to begin, however, staff say much work still needs to be done to bring the building back up to code and make it fully accessible under Provincial guidelines.

"New information and unforeseen conditions have invalidated both original estimates and early feasibility studies, thus impacting staff's ability

to complete the project under its existing authority," said Kyle Stitt, Facilities Management, in a report to Council.

An initial feasibility study conducted in 2024 assessed the bulk of the building, but they were not able to access sub floor components at the time. Further reviews were carried out in 2025, the report notes. It was here they found the building's floors had "badly deteriorated" due to dry rot and would be unable to support the weight required under the Ontario Building Code.

The existing brick addition to the back of the building was also found to be in the way of building a new

ramp to be in compliance with AODA (Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act).

"The current south addition does not harmonize with the existing heritage building, nor the newly-developed Aurora Town Square," Stitt continued. "To achieve a usable facility that is conducive to supporting long-term use, demolition and construction of a new slab on grade flooring structure, as well as a new addition compliant with AODA requirements, is needed.

"Due to the newly understood project complexity, consulting services to assist with detailed design and contract administration may account for ~20 per cent of construction costs. In 2025, staff contracted an architectural firm to conduct additional reviews and initial concept design under a low value procurement. Given the expanded scope and complex coordination related to the project, a contract amendment is required to continue with design and construction administration services. Anticipated consulting costs are expected to be near \$250,000 and may exceed if additional design work is required throughout the project."

Last year, Victoria Hall was due to be included in a request for expressions of interest issued by the Town looking for new tenants for the Aurora Armoury and the Café at Aurora Town Square following the exit of Niagara College's Canadian Food & Wine Institute at both venues.

The café spot was subsequently filled by Newmarket's My Indie Coffee, while Uxbridge's Slabtown Cider Company formally opened Slabtown Armoury in the spot this past fall.

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# BUSINESS & FINANCE



## Blue Door giving a helping hand to senior men with assist from Trillium Foundation

BY BROCK WEIR  
EDITOR  
LOCAL JOURNALISM  
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Habib had been living a comfortable life in Canada for more than 40 years, perhaps even by his own admission, a little more comfortable than the average person.

But, after a financial crisis and family challenges, he suddenly found himself struggling to make rent on his bachelor apartment.

"After three-and-a-half months, I was tired of life," he shared, noting he soon called Ontario Works where he was connected with Blue Door, which has been providing the York Region community with emergency and transitional housing support programs, and more, for five decades.

Habib is now a grateful resident in transitional housing provided by Blue Door and shared his story in Aurora on Thursday afternoon as Blue Door celebrated the receipt of an \$87,300 capital grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation.

The grant benefited Blue Door's Forward program, which is dedicated to providing transitional housing to senior men in need.

Funds were used to renovate the program's residences to allow men to live in a "secure, dignified environment"

with the services they need, focusing on regaining stability.

"For more than 40 years, Blue Door has been a pillar of support here in York Region," said Newmarket-Aurora MPP Dawn Gallagher Murphy at the February 5 recognition event held at Construct, a social enterprise of Blue Door, which provides skills training in the trades. "They provide emergency housing, as we all know, but they also provide innovative programs and that's what I'm talking about with the Construct program as well. It really helps rebuild stability, dignity and hope in people's lives.

Forward is Blue Door's transitional housing program for senior men by supporting essential renovations that improve safety, accessibility and overall quality of life for the residents. Thanks to this funding, senior men who are at risk of homelessness will benefit from safer entryways, enhanced outdoor spaces and critical infrastructure upgrades that ensure Forward remains a secure, welcoming and supportive environment. These improvements will allow residents to focus on their health, regain stability, and successfully transition toward permanent housing and community reintegration."

Forward, added MPP Gallagher Murphy, is about more than just housing. She described it as a "lifeline" that supports "senior men who are facing significant



MPP Dawn Gallagher Murphy, members of the Blue Door and Construct teams, and representatives from the Ontario Trillium Foundation celebrated the success of a recent Trillium Grant benefiting Blue Door's Forward program on Thursday.

Auroran photo by Glenn Rodger

barriers, such as fixed incomes, mobility challenges, discrimination and rising housing costs, which we all know and all feel."

"With nearly 28 per cent of senior-led households in Canada classified as being in core housing need, programs like Forward remain essential in creating pathways to safety and independence."

Canadian seniors living on fixed incomes, particularly in York Region, are "being disproportionately affected by rising household costs," according to Julie Ralph, a member of Blue Door's Board of Directors and Governance Committee.

"This funding has allowed Blue

Door to invest directly in our Forward program, our program for transitional housing designed to support senior men in accessing safe, dignified housing, but while addressing the real barriers related to mobility, health and accessibility," said Ralph. "With the support from the Ontario Trillium Foundation and work completed by MPS Property Services, we have been able to make important upgrades to the Forward property to improve both safety and quality of life for residents. We are deeply grateful to the Ontario Trillium Foundation for investing in solutions that promote stability, dignity and long-term housing outcomes."



### MP SANDRA COBENA'S UPDATE

Sandra Cobena, MP  
Newmarket-Aurora

### To Win Gold, You Need a Good Diet

hurting and need immediate help.

But honesty matters. This is a band-aid, not a cure. There are also many Canadians who feel like the working poor and earn just enough to miss the cutoff, yet struggle to afford both housing and groceries. And this program will cost \$12.4 billion over six years. At a time of massive deficits, this

credit risks fueling the very inflation that helped drive grocery prices up in the first place.

That's why this approach must be temporary. In the meantime, I will continue to fight for lasting solutions, including:

- Boosting competition in the grocery sector
- Reversing massive inflationary deficits
- Scrapping taxes that drive up the cost of food

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# Toronto police officers charged for ties with organized crime

BY BROCK WEIR  
EDITOR  
LOCAL JOURNALISM  
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Seven Toronto Police Service Officers, including Caledon resident Saurabji Bedi, are among 26 individuals charged by York Regional Police following a seven-month investigation into organized crime and corruption.

Dubbed Project South, the investigation resulted in the arrest of 19 additional suspects from outside the Toronto Police Service for their alleged ties to organized crime, including 49-year-old King Township resident Phillip Lecos.

The charges were announced at York Regional Police (YRP) Headquarters on Thursday, February 5, by YRP Chief Jim MacSween, accompanied by Toronto Police Chief Myron Demkiw.

"While this is a deeply disappointing and sad day for policing, this investigation also underscores the insidious corrosive nature of organized crime," said MacSween. "It highlights how these criminals find a way to infiltrate even the most well-protected institutions across our society. The impacts of organized crime in our community, on our safety and well-being, cannot be understated."

Investigators allege that Toronto Police officers had unlawfully accessed personal information. This information was then funneled to other criminals who carried out shootings and other violent offenses. The investigation also uncovered evidence of other illicit activity."

Residents, conceded MacSween, "may feel shaken, confused, or angry" with the news, but said the YRP is "resolute" in its commitment to "identifying, apprehending, and prosecuting everyone responsible for these reprehensible crimes."

"While we work collectively to right these wrongs, please know we are committed to transparency because it's the only way to rebuild trust. Now, it's also important to note this investigation and the subsequent arrests are thanks to the dedication and commitment of hundreds of police officers. To those officers who were called to investigate their own and who have been working around the clock for many months, thank you very much. Your professionalism and commitment to public safety has, without a doubt, made this province safer. This includes members of the Toronto Police Service whose participation was integral to this investigation."

Among the total charges outlined by YRP Deputy Chief Ryan Hogan were conspiracy to commit murder, shootings, extortion, robbery, drug-trafficking, and firearms offenses.

"It is alleged that these officers have demonstrated varying degrees of criminality and associations to criminal networks. The allegations of

criminal corruption include bribery, obstruction of justice, drug trafficking, theft of personal property, breach of trust, and the unauthorized access and distribution of confidential information," said Hogan. "We are alleging that some police officers who were collecting personal and private information unlawfully and distributing it to members of organized crime, which ultimately resulted in serious harm in our communities."

"Our investigation began in June 2025 when a conspiracy unfolded to murder a member of corrections management who was working at an Ontario correctional institution. Over a 36-hour period, a number of suspects attended this member's home in York Region, we allege for the purpose of murdering him.... These brazen actions highlight the clear dangers that were faced by the victim, his family, and the police officers that were there to protect him. The three suspects who were arrested by police officers at the scene...were in possession of a loaded handgun."

"As investigators pieced together the events leading up to this crime, it was determined that a Toronto police officer, Constable Timothy Barnhardt, had unlawfully accessed confidential information about the victim. We allege that this officer then released the information to a Mr. Brian DaCosta and from there it was released further into other criminal networks."

Hogan said Police allege Da Costa is a "key figure" in a criminal network operating within the GTA with "significant international ties." He is among the accused alleged to have sought and obtained confidential information from various Toronto police officers which we allege was to facilitate crime," said Hogan.

"In some cases, police officers were offered bribes for this information. We have identified a number of serious criminal acts that have occurred following the release of confidential information almost in real time. This includes extortion, commercial robberies and seven shootings right here in York Region. We allege that those shootings were, in part, facilitated by the release of confidential information from Constable Barnhardt to Mr. Da Costa and Mr. Satanowsky."

Bedi, added Hogan, is among four TPS officers alleged to be involved in an operation "orchestrated" by Da Costa.

"We allege that these officers in particular were involved with Mr. Da Costa in supporting illegal cannabis dispensaries by accepting bribes to provide, ultimately, protection from law enforcement investigation," said Hogan, noting the four are charged with various cocaine trafficking-related offences.

Speaking at Thursday's press conference TPS Chief Demkiw

described the charges as a "painful and unsettling moment" that needs to be addressed openly and honestly.

"No corner of society is immune from the reach of organized crime. But when organized crime penetrates the Toronto Police Service, the harm goes far beyond the immediate wrongdoing," he said. "Corruption has no place in policing. It strikes at the trust people place in us. As such, in our quest to tackle these types of allegations, we are committed to leaving no stone unturned."

"From day one, our priority was to ensure the independence of this investigation, to ensure it was conducted with great care, diligence and professionalism, and to seek justice, no matter how difficult that pursuit may be. The charges are proof of this commitment. And our hope is, the integrity of this investigation is the first step in helping Torontonians feel confident in the trust they place in us... The reality remains, we have a long road ahead of us. Our top responsibility is to undertake the hard work of honest examination, to

look critically at how this occurred, to identify the weaknesses, and to address them in a way that upholds the trust placed in the Toronto Police. These events underscore the need for constant vigilance and modern oversight. To that end, the chair of the Toronto Police Service Board and I have requested the Inspector General of Policing to immediately launch an independent external inspection.

"Restoring trust requires more than words. It requires sustained effort, openness to scrutiny, and the humility to change. That is the work ahead, and it is the work our service is committed to performing."

Badi faces the following charges: Conspiracy to Obstruct Justice (x2), Conspiracy to Commit Public Mischief – Falsely Accuse Person; Peace Officer Conspiracy to Accept a Bribe; Conspiracy to Traffic in Substance; Traffic in Substance.

Lecos, 49, is charged with Possession of Property Obtained by Crime Exceeding \$5,000.

None of the allegations and charges have been proven in court.

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# Heritage Week continues beyond Monday kick-off with tour, movie screening

*This year marks 20th anniversary of Heritage Conservation District*

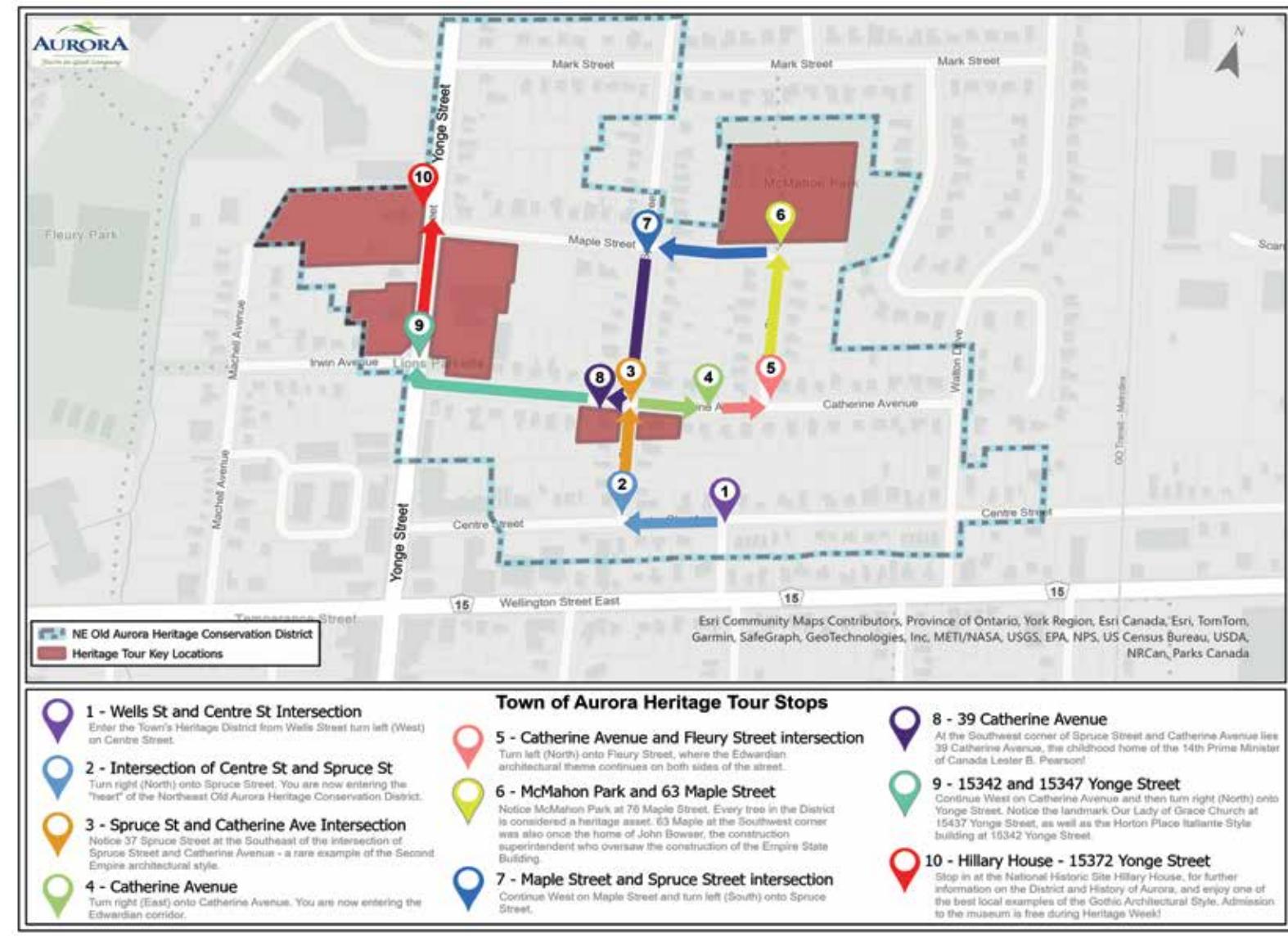
BY BROCK WEIR  
EDITOR  
LOCAL JOURNALISM  
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Heritage Week might start on Monday, February 16, but there will be more opportunities to take in Aurora's heritage throughout the week.

One of the ways you can do that is through a new self-guided Heritage Tour, which showcases such notable landmarks as Hillary House National Historic Site and several area neighbourhoods and intersections with stories to tell.

"The tour was developed by staff alongside input and review from the Town's Heritage Advisory Committee," says Adam Robb, Heritage Planner for the Town of Aurora. "The tour was conceived as a way of allowing residents to enjoy a self-guided experience during the duration of Heritage Week. Of course, the primary celebration is on February 16, but we wanted to provide further opportunity for residents and visitors to enjoy and experience local heritage throughout the balance of the week (and beyond!)."

The tour was developed specifically for the Northeast Old Aurora Heritage Conservation District area, as not only is it the Town's only Heritage Conservation District, but this year also marks the District's 20th anniversary, with the District Plan approved by Council in 2006. Points of interest were identified as a collaborative effort with Heritage Advisory Committee members (as some Committee members also live in the District area as well). A focus of the tour was to try and identify properties of varying architectural styles (Edwardian on Fleury Street and Catherine Avenue; 2nd Empire at 37 Spruce Street; Italianate at Horton Place; Gothic at Hillary House, etc.), and also to highlight properties with unique stories and connections, such as to John Bowser or Lester B. Pearson. We also made sure to finish the tour at Hillary House, as the museum is offering free admission for the duration of Heritage Week.



"In developing the Tour, we also wanted to make it as readily available to users as possible. It can be accessed directly as an interactive GIS map, is available for direct download as a PDF map, and also has the tour stops listed in accessible format on the Town's Heritage Week webpage. We have been grateful to develop this tour as part of Heritage Week specifically, but also hope that it can serve as a platform for the continued promotion of the District and local heritage moving forward!"

This a hope of Aurora Historical Society curator Kathleen Vahey as she looks forward to welcoming guests to Hillary House National Historic Site next week,

not only to "step back in time" to see what life was like in an Aurora doctor's home more than 160 years ago and to take in their ongoing exhibition *Pills, Poisons and Painkillers*.

"With Hillary House being the only National Historic Site in Town, we're very thankful and appreciative to be featured on the tour," she says. "It's one of the best examples of Gothic Revival architecture in Ontario. I hope Heritage Week is just another way for people to engage with heritage in Town and maybe take a walk or a drive. There are multiple historic buildings on the walking tour and different topics that are going to be covered over Heritage Week

and it's just a great way to engage with the history and heritage of Aurora in a way we haven't done in at least the past few years.

For a full list of tour stops, and to access the StoryMap, visit [aurora.ca/heritageweek](http://aurora.ca/heritageweek).

When you've completed the tour, consider heading back to Aurora Town Square on February 20 for a screening of the movie *Night at the Museum* starring Ben Stiller and Dick Van Dyke.

Tickets for the screening are on sale now at [aurora.ca/whatson](http://aurora.ca/whatson) and discounts to the show will be given out to those who attend the Heritage Week launch at Aurora Town Square on Monday, beginning at 10 a.m.



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# Vinyl Party spins Music, Ambiance, Love – and horses – for Heritage Week kick-off



Historian David Heard is seen in a sea of vinyl – which is at the heart of a series of special presentations curated for Heritage Week. **Contributed photo**

BY BROCK WEIR  
EDITOR  
LOCAL JOURNALISM  
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Aurora's music history will be spun throughout Aurora Town Square on Monday as historian David Heard and his Dave's Vinyl Party take residents on a unique musical journey to mark the start of Heritage Week.

Heard, who is a familiar face throughout the community, and particularly during the summer where he spins a curated vinyl playlist at the Aurora Farmers' Market, has long been an advocate for the benefits analogue music has for the mind, body, and soul, and has translated this passion in new ways for the heritage program.

Heritage Week begins at Aurora Town Square on Monday, February 16, and throughout the day, Heard will present "Music, Ambiance, Love and Heritage" in the Aurora Town Square café. Nearby, Heard will showcase A Tribute to the Aurora Horse Show, which is very much in keeping with the musical theme; as is Aurora's Connection to The Beatles' Sgt. Pepper, a unique display Heard will present on Aurora Town Square's second floor.

"February is a tough month for a lot of people – the weather's been exceptionally cold, the world is a little tilted on its axis with all the conflicts going on, and it is stressful for a lot of

people," says Heard. "It's not just that I'm excited about celebrating Aurora's heritage, it's because of the timing. People need something like this and I think it's absolutely wonderful it launches this weekend with Valentine's Day on a Saturday and Family Day weekend stuff going on. You've got Arctic Adventure going on, but maybe some people can't do the outdoors, maybe they have mobility challenges – now there's Town Square. There's a lot of stuff going on, so Aurora's going to be a really happening place this weekend!"

Heard's interest in Aurora's heritage runs deep and encompasses many of its facets, but when he brainstormed what he could bring to the Heritage Week program, he said his first choice was an easy one: illustrating Aurora's connection to the Beatles' iconic album Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band.

"It's always a powerful story for people, the lore of the OPP patch on Paul McCartney's shoulder and everything, so I thought it would be a great way to just do a visual display," he says, noting the display includes a replica of the costume in question.

With Valentine's Day on Saturday, the second element he wanted to bring to the table was also clear: a curated collection of love songs – but not just the ballads. Expect funk, reggae, rock, and more.

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

### From page 4

- Most exchanges are expected to take place in early March.

Ontario is shifting to a full producer-responsibility model. Under this approach, producers will design, operate, and fund 100% of the Blue Box system. This means: a single, standardized recycling program province-wide; More materials accepted for recycling; No municipal costs for Blue Box services.

As Ontario transitions five million households to the new Blue Box system, some communities have experienced early challenges, including collection delays, changes to bin size or frequency, delayed bin deliveries, unclear communication about pick-up times, and weather-related disruptions. In response, Circular Materials—the not-for-profit organization operating the new system—is actively working to clear collection backlogs, increase customer service capacity, provide smaller bin options where needed, and improve communication with residents.

To ensure timely assistance, residents should follow this two-step process:

- Contact your local service provider first.

- More than 80% of issues—such as missed pick-ups, delays, or damaged carts—are resolved quickest at this level.
- Find your service provider's contact information here: <https://www.circularmaterials.ca/resident-provinces/ontario/>

- If the issue remains unresolved, escalate to Circular Materials:

- Circular Materials – Resident Relations Team
- Email: [customerservice@circularmaterials.ca](mailto:customerservice@circularmaterials.ca)
- Phone: 1-877-667-2626

My office will continue monitoring this transition and advocating for smooth, reliable service in our community. Please do not hesitate to reach out if you require further assistance or wish to share feedback.

Dawn Gallagher Murphy, MPP  
Newmarket-Aurora

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"I'm spinning a marathon from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., no repeats, and I can guarantee you that there are going to be people bopping through Town Square," he says. "I pride myself in making enhanced spaces with what I do. I don't crank the music, I just set myself up in a nice little corner and the music just emanates through the whole building."

"The third one is very special to me. The number-one thing when I've gone out and done speaking engagements or walking tours, or on my social media, the thing that people really get most excited about is the memories of the Aurora Horse Show. I have some photographs of thousands and thousands of people just packing the hills watching world-class riders. We were the last stop every four years before the Olympics, and really the world was watching because we had riders from England, Brazil, Mexico and Iran. There were dog shows, baking contests, it was community – and every summer, that's what we looked for."

So, how does the history of the Aurora Horse Show mesh with Dave's vinyl?

A 100 square foot mural, set to be assembled in the Aurora Town Square café space, encompassing more than 100 individual albums featuring horses in their cover art.

If you can correctly guess – or count – the number of individual horses depicted in the mural, there just might be a prize in the offing!

"With my musical displays, I'm trying to create an environment where it distracts from the distractions of the busy world we're in, whether it be the digital world or maybe something someone's struggling with in their life," he says. "I've struggled a lot and I can tell you, I know this collection has, without a doubt, saved my life. I

thought, why would I be the only one that would be impacted if I can come up with unique programming?"

"People are struggling right now, whether it be economically, emotionally. It's been a horrible, horrible, cold winter. I guess the love program says it all. I just want to bring a little love to Aurora, a little bit of a positive distraction."

"I love heritage, and I love music – and Aurora's okay too!" he continues with a chuckle. "I just want to bring it, and I hope people will bring themselves and take it in, and let's just forget about the world for a few hours and be a community."

*For more on Aurora's Heritage Week, visit [aurora.ca/heritageweek](http://aurora.ca/heritageweek).*



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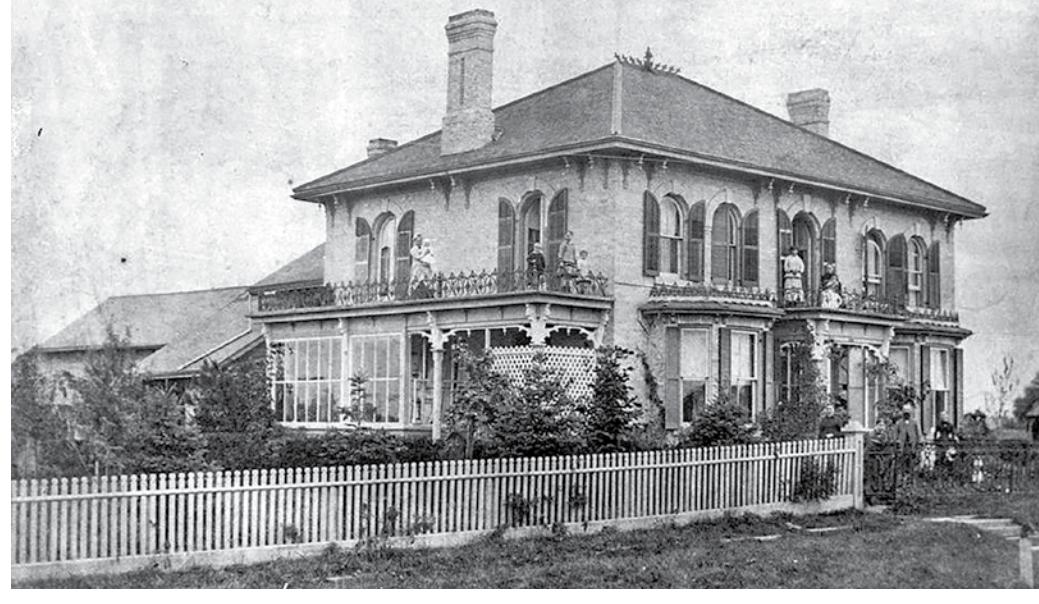


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# Aurora's historical storytellers return to Town Square for Family Day



Horton Place, which stands at the northwest corner of Yonge Street at Irwin Avenue, and is depicted in this Victorian archival photo, will be subject of a special talk at Heritage Week.

Image courtesy of the Town of Aurora

BY BROCK WEIR  
EDITOR  
LOCAL JOURNALISM  
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Examples of our heritage are all around us, but it takes a person with passion for history and the people who made it to really tease out their stories.

Jacqueline Stewart, John McIntyre, and Bob McRoberts are just three of those special people – and they have published works on Aurora to prove it. Now, they're returning to their historical storytelling roots on Monday when they kick off Heritage Week with quizzes, snapshots, and a peek behind the curtain of one of Yonge Street's most prominent residential landmarks.

The Aurora Town Square Performance Hall will provide the backdrop to Heritage Week's opening ceremonies on Monday, February 16, before being turned over to the trio who will each be leading three unique events.

The program begins at 10:30 a.m. with One Upon a Time: The Postcards of Olde Aurora, led by long-time educator, former Deputy Mayor of Aurora and School Trustee, and current member of Aurora's Heritage Advisory Committee Bob McRoberts.

McRoberts has long had a passion for collecting these ephemeral pieces of communication and, with his collection's extensive archive of Aurora-related missives, has used his collection to tell an evocative community story.

"I think it's a special opportunity for new and old residents in Town to come and enjoy and appreciate the Town that they live in, get different perspectives, whether it's a new resident looking to just get to know their community better or someone who has been here a long time," says McRoberts of Heritage Week.

While he has been a long-time collector, he made his first presentation on postcards back in 2011. This presentation eventually led to a book encapsulating Aurora's history through the medium, published in commemoration of Aurora's Sesquicentennial in 2013.

"Most of the cards I have – and I've now got over 300 for Once Upon a Time, are from the turn-of-the-century, early 1900s, and I think pictures can say a lot without necessarily a lot of words going with them," he says, before teasing. "I have a card from about 1906 where people are sliding down a hill at the back of some houses on a toboggan and I have no idea where that is located, where the houses are, so I would be very interested in someone helping me to identify where that mystery postcard was taken!"

If you're particularly good with photo IDs, you're a shoe-in for the next activity: The Great Aurora Built Heritage Quiz at 1 p.m., led by former Aurora Museum curator, author, and regular Time Traveller's Diary columnist Jacqueline Stewart.

"I thought this would be mildly entertaining for people," says Stewart with trademark self-deprecation. "The slides are odds and ends that people might not have noticed; in some cases, the smallest things that people might not have noticed

before and might like to hear more about. After I show or explain the location, I will give a little bit of information to draw people's attention and give them a little, fun challenge to identify what they are seeing."

"There's always so much to learn," she adds when asked what keeps her continually engaged in Aurora's heritage. "There's always the little details, and I think the most difficult things to find out are about people's personal lives."

That hasn't necessarily been a challenge for McIntyre, a life-long Aurora resident until his recent move to Nova Scotia. Before the move, he called Horton Place, the sandy-coloured brick house on the northwest corner of Yonge Street and Irwin Avenue, home – and that is the basis of his virtual talk: Discovering the Stories of Horton Place at 2 p.m.

"It's certainly exciting and just knowing I can still be a part of this at a long distance is certainly very gratifying," says McIntyre of Heritage Week. "I've always been very concerned about the importance of heritage and the belief in the way that if we have an appreciation of our heritage, it makes our present much more rich and fulfilling. It just means that we have a better community all-around."

McIntyre has been immersed in an ongoing project charting the histories of two particular branches of his family tree, and, in the process, was particularly struck by the stories his grandparents left behind of their time at the landmark house, which is now home to the offices of Desjardins agent Richard Gong.

The house, says McIntyre, was built by dentist Dr. Alfred Robinson, part of the first graduating class from the University of Toronto's School of Dentistry.

"Previously, dentistry had been something that was practiced by your local physician, not by specialists, but he had received specific training in dentistry and dental surgery and the use of what we would call today as laughing gas, which meant that he could advertise painless dentistry, even though I don't know that that was actually painless," says McIntyre.

"In 1901, after Dr. Robinson's death, the Robinson family sold the house to my grandparents, Della Petch Webster and Charles Webster. I have been very fortunate in that they left behind a wonderful archive of diaries and letters, very meticulously described originally their courtship in the late 1890s and their marriage in their early years at Horton Place."

His grandmother, who was born in 1875, always dreamed of living at Horton Place, having often visited the house for dance lessons and other activities organized by the dentist's daughters.

As newlyweds, his grandparents rented a small house a block away from Horton Place, but when the house was put up for sale in 1901, they jumped at the chance to buy it and make her dream a reality.

To hear the full story, turn out for the start of Heritage Week at Aurora Town Square this Monday, February 16.

For a full roster of events not just on Family Day but throughout the week, visit [aurora.ca/heritageweek](http://aurora.ca/heritageweek).

## Future of Finance



BY BENITO ELISA

CEO of Wakanda 4.0 Inc

The future of finance is not about replacing the existing system overnight—it is about re-architecting financial infrastructure around digital assets, programmable money, and regulatory alignment.

At its core, finance is moving from institution-centric models to protocol-centric systems, where value transfer, custody, settlement, and compliance are embedded directly into technology. Blockchain enables 24/7 settlement, borderless value exchange, and atomic transactions, reducing friction that legacy intermediaries were built to manage. Stablecoins and tokenized real-world assets bridge crypto with traditional finance. The Blockchain and digital assets Industry is not only about Bitcoin but much more than that.

Regulation will not kill this transformation—it will shape and legitimize it. Jurisdictions in North America, the EU, Africa and parts of Asia are converging

toward frameworks that recognize digital assets as a new financial primitive, not a fringe experiment. The winners will be platforms that combine self-custody, transparency, and compliance-by-design.

In the next decade, finance will look less like banks and more like financial operating systems: wallets replacing accounts, smart contracts replacing paperwork, and global access replacing geographic privilege. Trust will shift from institutions to verifiable code, cryptography, and regulated digital rails.

In short, the future of finance is digital, decentralized, regulated, and programmable—and those building responsibly today are defining tomorrow's financial order.

Wakanda 4.0 Inc will be organizing regular training on Digital Assets, Blockchain and Tokenization. Keep pace with innovation and the latest developments in the new world of finance.

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WEEK OF FEBRUARY 12, 2026

## 15U Panthers edge Utah Lady Grizzlies 2-1 in opening game of 27th annual Silver Stick Tournament



A ceremonial face-off on Friday afternoon signalled the start of the 27<sup>th</sup> annual Silver Stick Tournament at the Aurora Community Centre.

**Auroran photo by Jim Stewart**

**BY JIM STEWART**  
LOCAL JOURNALISM  
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Karys Dysart and Paige Gallant scored one goal each to lead the 15U Central York Panthers to a thrilling 2-1 victory over the Utah Lady Grizzlies on Friday afternoon at the ACC.

The Panthers-Grizzlies contest, featuring a dramatic last-minute goal by Dysart, served as a crescendo to the colorful Opening Ceremonies of the 27th Annual Silver Stick international hockey tournament.

Central York Panthers President Mark Dubeau, Mayor Tom Mrakas, and a quintet of Silver Stick executives took to the red carpet at centre ice to kick off the prestigious tourney. Opening ceremonies included a gesture of international sportsmanship when the Canadian and American teams exchanged coins and the team captains posed for two ceremonial faceoffs.

All four teams—including the U11BB Panthers and Southern Colorado Blue 10U—gathered for a group shot with the dignitaries in the neutral zone.

Mayor Mrakas welcomed attendees at the ACC to the long-running tournament, but played favorites with his final remark before the ceremonial faceoff: “With all due respect to all the teams at the tournament, let’s go Panthers.”

The Mayor got his wish for a Panthers’ win, but the outcome of the Central York-Utah game was not determined until the final minute of play.

Dysart fired the game-winning goal with 27 seconds left on the scoreboard. Her high wrist shot from above the right faceoff circle found a seam through a maze of players, beat Utah goaltender Addison Luth cleanly, and elicited a spirited celly by the Panthers.

The articulate hometown hero described her decisive marker.

“I called for the puck and saw an opening to shoot it. It all felt surreal. I had no idea that it went in, but it was a

nice way to end it. It was a good feeling to win a hard-fought game.”

Dysart credited Panthers’ goaltender Clara West for playing a key role in the win over the Lady Grizzlies.

“She’s really good. She keeps us in so many games. Clara is always there and she’s a leader of this team in so many ways. She holds us together.”

In addition to the stellar goaltending Central York received from West, Dysart noted that the team had this game circled on the calendar for weeks and discussed the importance of starting the tournament strongly on Friday afternoon.

“We’ve known about playing an American team for over four weeks so we really wanted to win this game. It’s nice to be part of this tournament and to win our game today.”

After a scoreless first period that showcased the goaltending talents of West and Luth, the blue-clad Panthers opened the scoring at 8:20 of the second period. Central York forward Paige Gallant fired a wrist shot from between the circles that seemed to handcuff Luth. Gallant’s quick shot dipped through the five-hole and into the left corner of the net to give the home side a 1-0 lead.

However, a parade to the penalty box by the Panthers near the end of the second period gifted the Lady Grizzlies with a 5-on-3 power play. Utah took advantage of the extra space on the ice against the Panthers’ triangle defense when Grizzlies’ defender Katie Damon snapped a shot from the right point that sailed past a screened West. Damon’s power play goal tied the game 1-1 with eleven seconds left on the clock.

The Panthers and Grizzlies pushed through the final frame—creating numerous scoring opportunities including three breakaways that were foiled by the valiant netminders. Dysart’s last-minute heroics sent the Panthers’ fans home with a big international tournament win to cap off the Silver Stick’s Opening Ceremonies.

Utah Lady Grizzlies Head Coach

Bryan Bylsma was gracious in defeat and applauded both teams.

“It was a hell of a game. Getting to play games like this—to play strong Canadian teams—is why we’re here. We’re here for the competition connected to Silver Stick tournaments. We qualified in California to play here. This is the first time in Canada for most of our players so it’s an exciting time for them.”

As the son of Stanley Cup-winning Head Coach Dan Bylsma looked up at the tournament schedule at the ACC, the friendly bench boss had one goal in mind for his Utah squad: “We have to win tomorrow.”

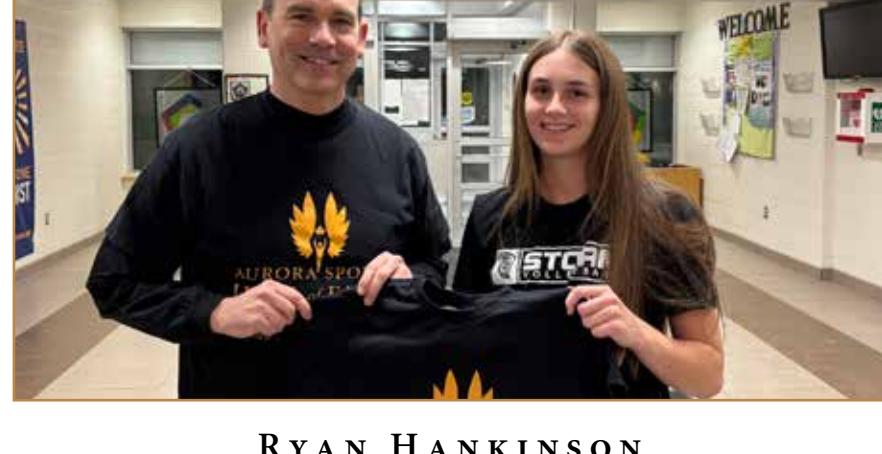


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**RYAN HANKINSON**  
STORM VOLLEYBALL CLUB

Ryan Hankinson is a 15-year-old Grade 10 student at St. Maximilian Kolbe Catholic High School. She exemplifies dedication, leadership, and balance as both a student and athlete. An honour roll student with an average above 90 percent, Ryan approaches her academics with the same focus and discipline that define her passion for volleyball.

Ryan has been a proud member of the Storm Volleyball Club since the U11 level and has steadily grown within the program to become a co-captain of the U16 Storm team. Her long-term commitment to the club reflects a deep passion for volleyball and continuous self-improvement. This season, Ryan embraced a major challenge by transitioning from middle hitter to a pivotal outside hitter role. Her adaptability, volleyball IQ, and steady performance have made her an essential part of the team’s success.

The Storm enjoyed a memorable season last year by capturing gold at the Division 1, Tier 2 Provincial Championships in Ottawa and finishing 9th overall among more than 300 clubs across Ontario. Ryan’s individual contributions did not go unnoticed as she was named Team MVP last year, a testament to her consistency, impact, and leadership on the court. The team is currently ranked 15th in the province and competing at a high level again.

Coach Jessica Harris praises Ryan for her calm presence and dedication, noting that her composure and work ethic naturally elevates those around her. Ryan effectively leads by example and relies on her preparation and resilience while supporting her teammates in both training and competition.

Away from the team, Ryan is passionate about giving back to the sport. She enjoys the time spent mentoring and instructing athletes aged 7 to 12 within the Storm Volleyball Academy. Outside of volleyball, Ryan enjoys listening to country artist Zach Bryan and looks up to the University of Nebraska’s standout volleyball player Harper Murray.

Congratulations, Ryan!



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# Junior Tigers' leading scorer Cayden Smith promoted to the Erie Otters of the OHL

BY JIM STEWART

The Aurora Junior A Tigers have developed an enviable record this season for developing and moving their players to the next level of hockey.

Last Wednesday, that trend continued when Assistant Captain Cayden Smith was promoted to the Erie Otters of the Ontario Hockey League.

Prior to reporting to his new club in Pennsylvania, the gritty and durable centre fired 18 goals and earned 28 assists in 42 games for the Tigers.

The Tigers' leading scorer joined former Aurora teammate and outstanding defender Nick Frasca in the Otters lineup versus the Guelph Storm on Thursday night and the Flint Firebirds on Saturday night.

By being promoted to the OHL, Smith also joined former Tiger teammate and goaltender Matthew Humphries who was signed by the Oshawa Generals in mid-January. Humphries made 30 saves in a 4-3 OT loss to the Sudbury Wolves on Sunday and turned aside 44 shots in a 5-4 loss to the Sarnia Sting on Friday. Humphries has made a



## Aurora grows again with the return of the John Abel Community Garden

The Town of Aurora is excited to welcome back the John Abel Community Garden for its second year, continuing a growing program that brings residents together to learn, share, and cultivate fresh food in a community setting.

Located at John Abel Park, the community garden offers planter box-style plots that are available for annual allocation to individuals and community groups. The program encourages hands-on learning, connection with nature, and opportunities to support personal food growth while strengthening community ties.

"Programs like the John Abel Community Garden show how much we can learn when we come together," said Mayor Tom Mrakas. "It's about understanding sustainable living, sharing knowledge with neighbours,

and creating a space where our community can grow, and we're proud to see this program continue and thrive."

Last year, Town staff grew and collected surplus produce and donated it to the Aurora Food Pantry, helping provide fresh food to local residents and families.

Applications for garden plots must be submitted by Friday, March 6, 2026. An annual non-refundable fee to rent a plot in the garden will be required. Selected applicants will be chosen through a random lottery process and will be responsible for maintaining their plots throughout the growing season, helping create a welcoming and productive garden space for everyone involved.

*To learn more and apply for a garden plot, visit [aurora.ca/JohnAbelPark](http://aurora.ca/JohnAbelPark).*

seamless transition from the OJHL to the OHL as workhorse in the crease and is a foundational piece on the rebuilding Oshawa club.

In addition to Smith, Frasca, and Humphries being promoted to the OHL, Aurora management also played in pivotal role in committing star defender Luke Howard to the NCAA Division I Rochester Institute of Technology Tigers for the 2025-26 season. Howard – since traded with his brother, Simon, to first-place Toronto in a mid-season blockbuster trade – earned three assists in the Patriots' 8-2 romp over the Caledon Admirals on Thursday night. After the OJHL season concludes with the powerhouse Patriots, Howard

will report to the D1 RIT Tigers in September.

Current Tigers' power forward Charlie Hotles – who is third in team scoring with 11 goals and 18 assists since arriving from the North York Rangers – has also played in the OHL this season. Hotles has suited up for the Flint Firebirds—moving back and forth between Ontario and Michigan during 2025-26.

In league play, the tenth-place Tigers dropped a pair of divisional games this week: a narrow 6-4 loss to ninth-place Markham at the ACC on Tuesday afternoon and a tough 6-2 decision to the eighth-place Muskies in Lindsay on Friday night.

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# Black History Month gala urges unity

## From page 1

Conservative Party of Ontario's first Black Cabinet Minister, took a moment to reach across the political divide by paying tribute to Ien, who served as Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Youth in Justin Trudeau's Liberal government, and her work to establish Canada's National Childcare Strategy.

"Global pressures remind us daily that our future will be shaped by the decisions we make now," Williams continued. "These challenges call for boldness, for innovation, it calls for unity, and for leadership that reflects the diversity and the dynamics of Ontario. That's why the voices in this room, and the communities all represented here, are so essential. Black entrepreneurs, Black educators, frontline workers, public servants, all you beautiful artists and youth, are shaping the culture and the economic fabric of our Province every single day. We are not contributors to the margins; we are drivers of a modern Ontario story – remember that."

Addressing the leaders of tomorrow in the audience, Williams said their leadership is needed now – "not someday in the distant future, but today."

"To all of us, if you ever walk into a room where you're the first or only, [remember] you belong there. You've earned your place, and you carry with you the strength, the sacrifice, and the brilliance of generations who prayed for your moment."

Among the local leaders joining ABC founder and president Phiona Durrant in underscoring this theme were Newmarket-Aurora MP Sandra Cobena, Newmarket-Aurora MPP Dawn Gallagher Murphy, and Mayor Tom Mrakas, who was joined by Ward 3 Councillor Wendy Gaertner, Ward 4 Councillor Michael Thompson, Ward 5 Councillor John Gallo, and Ward 6 Councillor Harold Kim.

And the cross-section of Black entrepreneurs, educators, frontline workers, and public service were well-represented in the room, several of whom received special honours during the evening.

Three recipients of the Dr. Jean Augustine Community Builder Award, an honour established by the ABC in the name of Dr. Augustine, the leading force behind the establishment of Black History Month in Canada, received their awards in the presence of the trailblazer herself: Ivan Dawns, a barrier-breaking union leader, ABC founding member Bobbie Marshall, who currently serves on the ABC's Board of Directors, and York Regional Police's Lincoln Boyd, who was described as "a consistent and genuine supporter" of the ABC's work.

Each received a trophy bearing the shape of a symbol that represented their contributions: Dawn, a lion to represent leading with strength and heart, Marshall a gold ocean wave, and Boyd, a similar wave depicted fittingly in police blue.

"The ocean represents your leadership

in service," said MP Cobena, reading Boyd's citation. "You show up again and again, not always loud, but always present, shaping change through consistency, integrity and care. Your service moves people forward, just like the waves shape the shore over time. We honour you for the depth of your commitment and the strength of your impact."

Bookending this year's Black History Month gala were words from Mayor Mrakas and King Nana Yaw Osam, both of whom built upon the night's theme of Collective Strength, Shared Future.

"As I look around this room, I see something powerful: connection, conversations, laughter, pride – and a community that has chosen to come together, not out of obligation, but out of respect. That matters. Because Black History Month is not just about remembering history, it's about recognizing people – people who built, contributed, challenged, led, and persevered," said Mayor Mrakas. "People whose stories are not separate from Canada's story, but essential to it."

"Black History Month reminds us that progress has never come easily, and has never come without courage," he continued. "The freedoms we enjoy today exist because individuals were willing to challenge injustice, to push past barriers, to insist on dignity and equality, even when the odds were stacked against them, but Black History is not only a story of struggle, it is a story of excellence. Of artists, educators, entrepreneurs, advocates, and community leaders whose impact continues to shape our Town, our region, our Province, and our Country. Of families who built lives here, raised the next generation, and helped make Aurora the welcoming community it is today."

It was his hope, he said, that people left the gala feeling inspired "not just by the history we honour, but by the future we can build together, that we carry these conversations beyond this room, and that we continue showing up for one another – not just this month, but every day."

Added King Nana Yaw Osam: "Today, we are not only honoring those who came before us, but also burning the flare of hope for those who will come after us. Our presence here is an indication to the strength that lies within our communities and the power of our shared culture. Yet, as we exhibit on the greatness of our past, let us also acknowledge the challenges that continue to confront us: fear, doubt, and division. These are the shadows that have too often held us back from realizing our true potentials. But I stand before you to be clear, we must let go of fear and doubt. We must rise above the voices that seek to divide us and instead embrace the power of unity and inclusivity."

"Let us remember that our diversity is our strength. Across continents and cultures, across languages and nights, we

are bound by a common dream. The dream of a world where every African child, every descendant of Africa, stands tall with pride, dignity, and purpose. I urge each of you, as leaders and as members of this great community, to reach out to one another with open hearts and open minds. Let us lift each other up, support each other's dreams and champion the cause of justice and equality wherever we go. Let us create spaces of belonging where no one is left behind and every voice is heard."

"Our future depends on our ability to work together, to share our knowledge, our resources and our love. Let us be bold in our activities of progress, fair in our commitment to inclusion and devote our dedication to the legacy of our ancestors. Tonight, we celebrate our rich heritage. Let us also renew our commitment to building a future where every person, regardless of background or circumstances, is empowered to succeed. Together let us be the architects of a new era, one defined not by fear, but by hope, not by doubt, but by determination, not by exclusion, but by unity."



Members of the George St. Kitts' band got the audience up on its feet and onto the dance floor.

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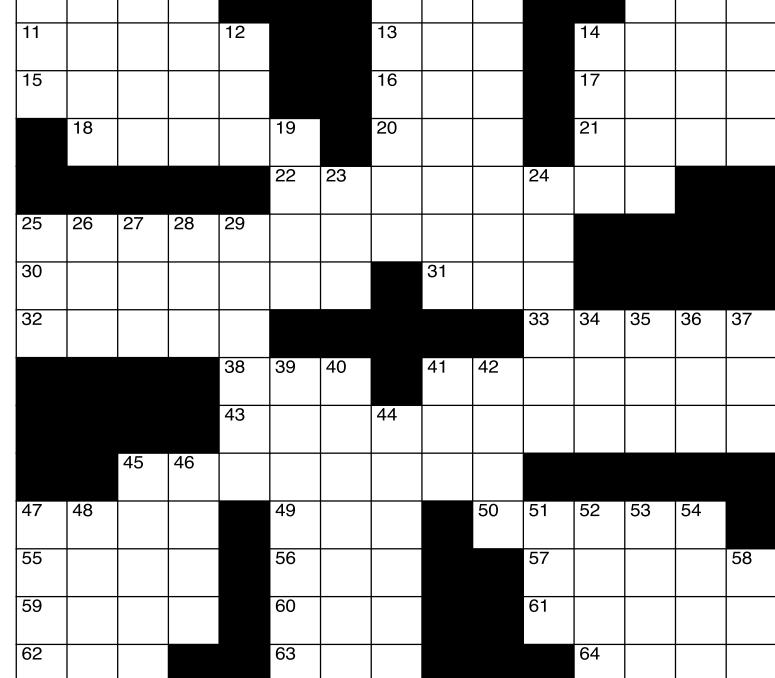


Union leader Ivan Dawns and Aurora Black Community Association founding member Bobbie Marshall receive the Dr. Jean Augustine Community Builder Award.

Auroran photos by Brock Weir and Glenn Rodger

## CROSSWORD

Puzzle No.TAFEB1226 • Solution in Classifieds



### CLUES ACROSS

- 1. Breezed through
- 5. Consumer protection agency
- 8. Criminal syndicate
- 11. Moves back from
- 13. Satisfaction
- 14. Feel concern or interest
- 15. Monetary units
- 16. Congressman (abbr.)
- 17. Israeli city
- 18. Restaurants
- 20. 2,000 lbs.
- 21. Grandmother
- 22. North, South and Central
- 25. In an early way
- 30. Foes
- 31. Social networking platform
- 32. Early term for basketball player
- 33. Another name for sesame plant
- 38. Disallow
- 41. Provide greater detail
- 43. Inaccessible
- 45. Evoke emotions
- 47. Ancient kingdom near Dead Sea
- 49. Celtic punk rockers
- 50. A fencing sword
- 55. Actor Idris
- 56. Affirmative (slang)
- 57. Afflicted in mind or body
- 59. One point north of northeast
- 60. Born of
- 61. Social media hand gesture
- 62. Hong Kong food stall \_\_ pai dong
- 63. Opposite of beginning
- 64. Email function

### CLUES DOWN

- 1. Sign language
- 2. Fashionable
- 3. Borough in Helsinki
- 4. Inability to hear
- 5. More quickly
- 6. An idea accepted as a demonstrable truth
- 7. Shrewdly
- 8. Rooney and Kate are two
- 9. Mediterranean port
- 10. Benedictine monk
- 12. Midway between south and southeast
- 14. Town in Galilee
- 19. Satisfy
- 23. Mice genus
- 24. Brass instrument
- 25. Chest muscle (slang)
- 26. Transmits genetic information from DNA
- 27. Records electric currents generated
- 28. Woman (French)
- 29. Short route aircraft
- 34. Pitching statistic
- 35. Pointed end of a pen
- 36. Popular sports league
- 37. Body part
- 39. Inoffensive
- 40. Yellowish cotton cloth
- 41. Feline
- 42. Does not tell the truth
- 44. Seduced
- 45. Spiritual leader
- 46. Abba \_\_, Israeli politician
- 47. Repair
- 48. Olive genus
- 51. Swiss river
- 52. Prejudice
- 53. C. European river
- 54. Keep under control
- 58. Father



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# THINGS... you ought to know

## FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 13

Galantine's Day Wine and Paint Night – 7 p.m. at Hillary House National Historic Site. Grab your girlfriends and enjoy a fun-filled paint night at Hillary House. In partnership with Royal Rose Art Gallery, you'll be guided through painting on a beautiful bottle of rosé wine. All materials provided. You get to enjoy the bottle of wine afterwards and be left with a beautiful vase! Light refreshments available, including a glass of wine per participant. \$50/pp. Tickets can be purchased on the AHS website ([www.aurorahs.com](http://www.aurorahs.com)) or by calling 905-727-8991.

## 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](http://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](http://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](http://aurora.ca/heritageweek).

## THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 19

AHS Speaker Series: Samantha George "Parkwood National Historic Site" – 7 p.m., virtual via Zoom. Join the Aurora Historical Society for the first Speaker Series event of 2026. Samantha George, Curator of Parkwood National Historic Site in Oshawa, will introduce audiences to the domestic stories of the McLaughlin Family, who called the large estate home. Members: \$10.50/\$12.50 non-members. Tickets can be purchased on the AHS website ([www.aurorahs.com](http://www.aurorahs.com)) or by calling 905-727-8991.

## SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 21

York Symphony Orchestra Presents: A Night at the Opera tonight at 8 p.m. at Trinity Anglican Church, Aurora. (79 Victoria Street). Be there to hear some of Canada's rising opera stars -- Sopranos Nicole Dubinsky and Angela Sanchez, Tenor Ross Mortimer and Baritone John Holland -- perform arias and duets by the giants of the opera stage, plus some of the most popular orchestral music of opera from Mozart, Rossini, Bizet, Offenbach, Donizetti, Verdi and Puccini.

## THURSDAY, MARCH 19

AHS Speaker Series: Heison Chak "Toronto's Lost Shipwreck" – 7 p.m., at Aurora Town Square or Virtual via Zoom. Hosted by the AHS in partnership with the Aurora Museum & Archives. Join us for a presentation by Heison Chak as he explores the four pillars of exploration through the recent rediscovery of a 200-year-old schooner in Toronto. Discover how modern technology and local research brings maritime heritage to life - showing that world-class discovery can begin close to home. Tickets can be purchased on the AHS website ([www.aurorahs.com](http://www.aurorahs.com)) or by calling 905-727-8991.

## SATURDAY, MARCH 28

Introduction to Paper Quilting. 1 p.m. Have you ever wanted to try paper quilling? In this introductory workshop, you will create a greeting card/piece of art using this easy to learn heritage craft. Workshop includes all materials. Taking place in the beautiful Hillary House National Historic Site Ballroom (2nd floor). Enjoy light refreshments, a short tour of Hillary House, and shop in the Gift Shop. Tickets can be purchased on the AHS website ([www.aurorahs.com](http://www.aurorahs.com)) or by calling 905-727-8991.

## ONGOING

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nominal fee of \$2.50. RSVP by visiting [meetup.com/Partagez-le-francais](http://meetup.com/Partagez-le-francais). For more information, visit [www.meetup.com/Partagez-le-francais](http://www.meetup.com/Partagez-le-francais).

\*\*\*\*

Support AbuseHurt's 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 Hurt's 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 Hurt's Warehouse is located at 1208 Gorham St, Unit 4, Newmarket - rear unloading dock. Visit [AbuseHurt's.ca](http://AbuseHurt's.ca) to select your drop off time slot.

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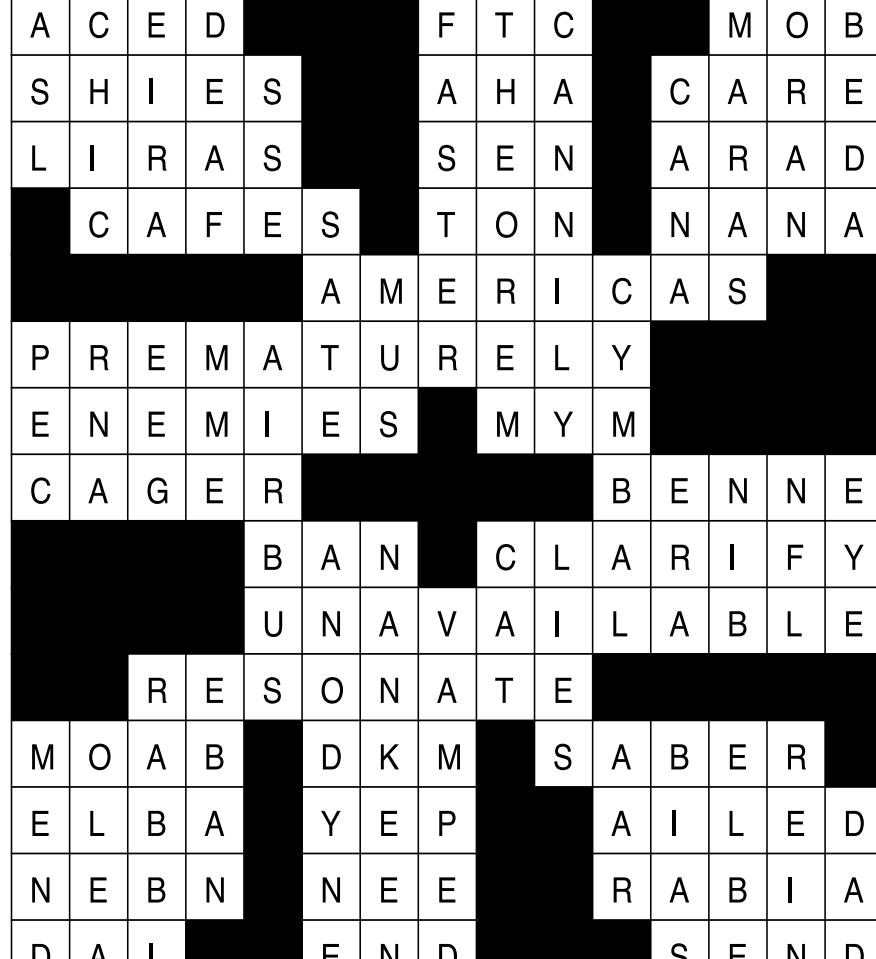
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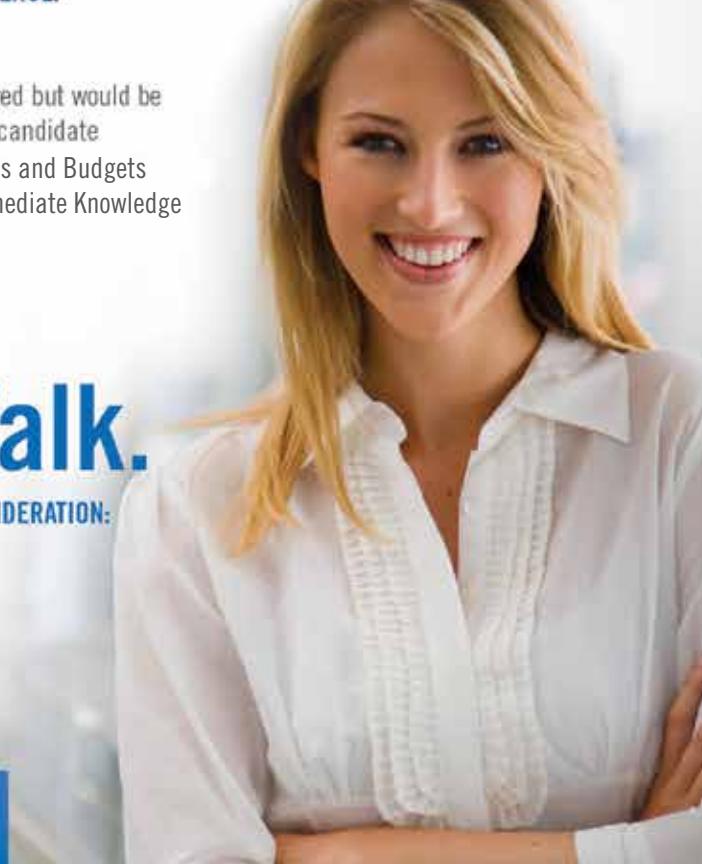
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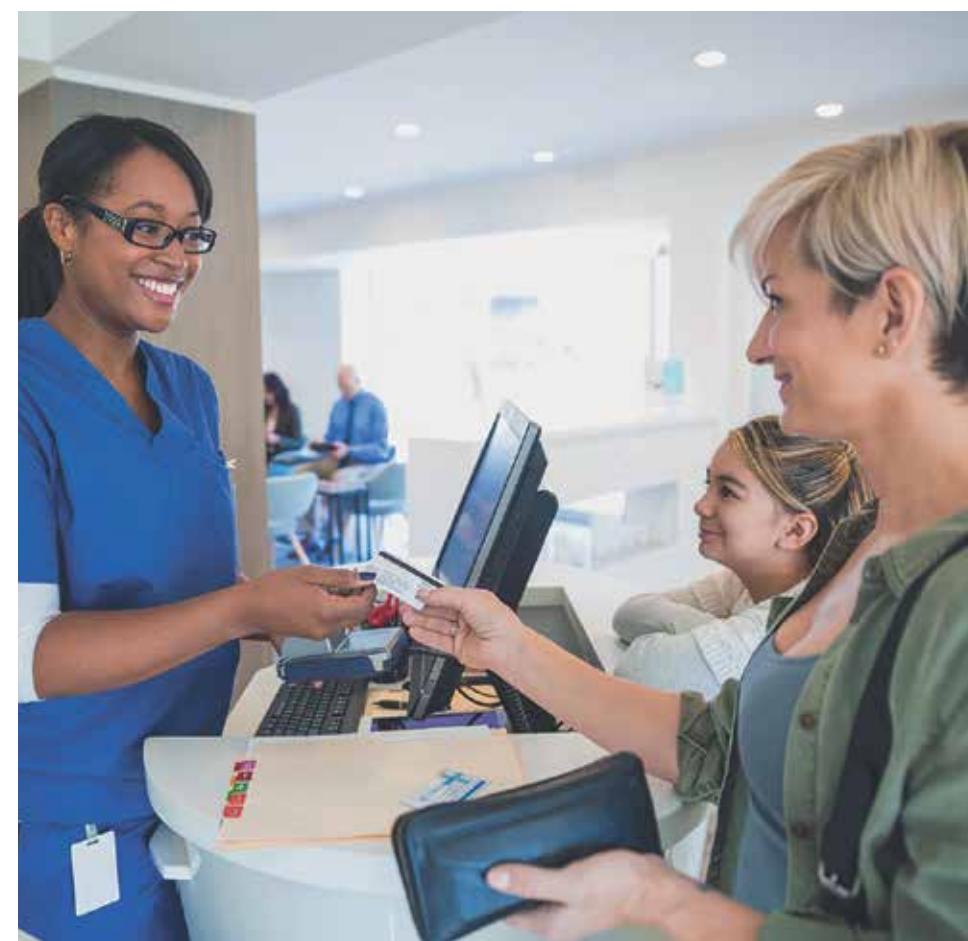
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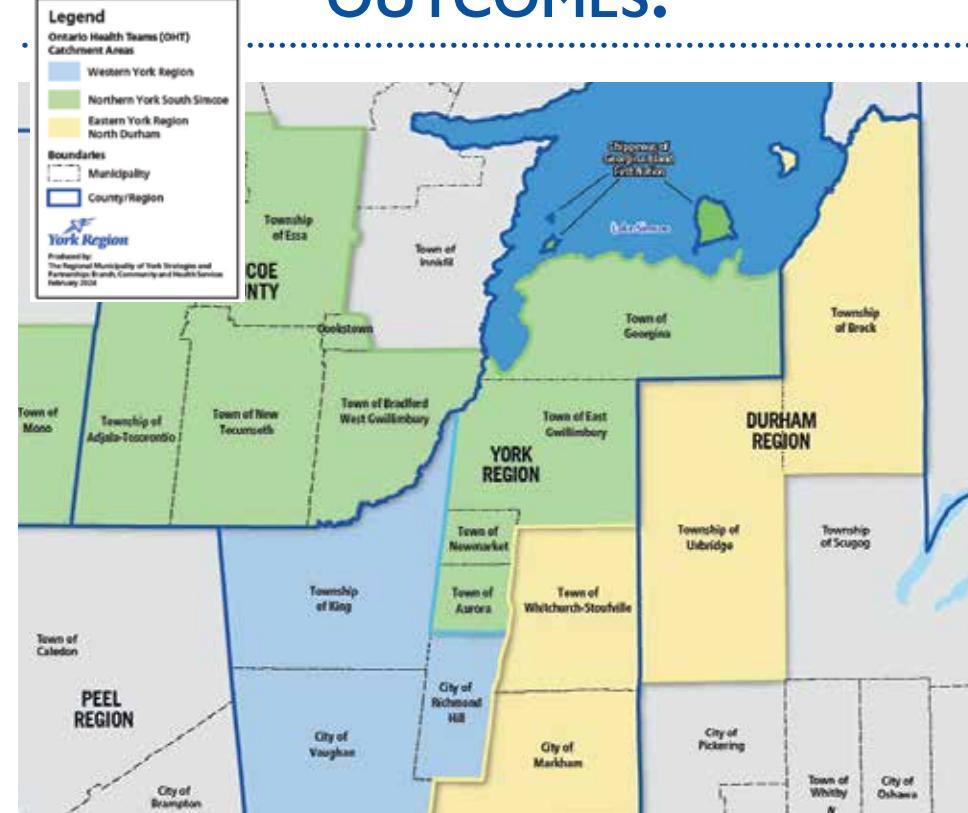
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