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Aurora's Community Newspaper

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FREE

WEEK OF MARCH 12, 2026



LUNAR NEW YEAR CELEBRATION - The Aurora Public Library's living room space provided the backdrop to a dazzling display by the Fang Hua Singing and Dance Troupe, celebrating the Lunar New Year. For more, see Page 17. **Auroran photo by Glenn Rodger**

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Region raises alarm bells over opioid use, declining mental health

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

York Region Public Health is raising alarm bells after recent studies have identified worrying trends when it comes to mental health, opioid use among youth, and food insecurity throughout York's nine municipalities.

The stats came through a Population Health Assessment presented to Regional

Council on March 5 by Dr. Faren Karachiwalla, York Region's Medical Officer of Health.

York Region has "quite a lot to be proud of" when it comes to Council's support for health, wellbeing and community resilience, she said, but some of the statistics presented last week raised concerns among elected officials.

"In York Region, cardiovascular disease is responsible for the majority

of hospitalizations [and] that mirrors the rest of the country, really," said Dr. Karachiwalla. "Mental health concerns are really on the rise. We used to have around 95 per cent of people reporting good mental health in the Region, and that's dropped since 2015 to 87 per cent in 2023 - quite a decline. When we survey secondary students, we do see that there [are] pretty high rates of serious

Continued on page 15



Canada's Minister of Industry, Mélanie Joly, speaks at an International Women's Day celebration at Aurora Town Square on Friday evening. **Auroran photo by Glenn Rodger**

Joly encourages public participation at International Women's Day talk

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

When Melanie Joly first ran for public office, she wasn't sure who her role models were.

Such historic public figures as John F. Kennedy and Charles De Gaulle influenced her decision to enter politics, but she came to the table with

Continued on page 25

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TOWN OF AURORA

NOTICE BOARD

March 12, 2026



Council & Committee Meetings

Date	Time	Location	Meeting
Week of March 16	No meetings		
Tuesday, March 24	7 p.m.	Council Chambers	Public Planning
Wednesday, March 25	7 p.m.	Holland Room	Active Transportation and Traffic Safety Advisory Committee
Thursday, March 26	10 a.m.	Video Conference	Aurora Appeal Tribunal/Property Standards Committee (if required)
Tuesday, March 31	5:45 p.m.	Holland Room	Council Closed Session (if required)
Tuesday, March 31	7 p.m.	Council Chambers	Council

*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: Celeste Kim - Fleeting Grace

Fleeting Grace grows out of my ongoing exploration of flowers as symbols of the soul—each one unique, fleeting, and alive with presence. I'm drawn to the way a flower flourishes briefly, dancing in its bloom before fading, mirroring the rhythms of our own lives. Through bold color, fluid form, and expressive movement, my paintings meditate on this delicate journey of becoming, being, and letting go, seeking to capture not just the image of a flower, but its essence—its joy, vulnerability, and quiet resilience. View in-person at Aurora Town Hall in the Skylight Gallery. View online at aurora.ca/SkylightGallery. All work is for sale. Please contact Sarah Reynolds at sreynolds@aurora.ca if you are interested in investing and owning a beautiful piece of art.

What's Happening

AURORA'S EASTERPALOOZA

Presented by **Aurora Home**

Saturday, April 4, 2026
9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.
Aurora Seniors' Centre, 90 John West Way

Indoor & outdoor activities include:
FACE PAINTING • EGG FISHING
EGG TOSS • HOPSTACLE COURSE • AND MORE!

Activity and treat bags for those 12 years of age and younger.
Have your photo taken with the Easter Bunny!

Wristbands are **\$5 per child** and must be purchased in advance at all Town facilities, excluding Aurora Community Centre.

aurora.ca/Easter

AURORA'S 2026 YOUTH INNOVATION FAIR

Wednesday, May 13
Aurora Town Square, 50 Victoria Street
Register by April 22

WIN INCREDIBLE PRIZES!

Youth Innovators!

- Grade 4 to 12
- Showcase your inventions and innovative ideas
- Platform for young change makers!
- Explore themes like STEM, Social Innovation, Robotics, Gaming, Esports, Green Tech and more!

Individuals or groups can participate.

aurora.ca/YouthInnovation

April 9

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aurora.ca/WhatsOn

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Planning Our Future: Yonge Street South

PUBLIC OPEN HOUSE

Mon. March 23
6 to 8 p.m.

Aurora Town Hall
100 John West Way

Helping shape building size, height, and design along Yonge Street, south of Industrial Parkway

Spring & Summer 2026 Program Guide

The **Spring & Summer 2026 Program Guide** is available to view online at 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 at aurora.ca/SummerCamps. Registration is open for Summer Camps 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.

62ND ANNUAL AURORA ART SHOW & SALE

REGISTRATION NOW OPEN!

For more information, visit aurora.ca/ArtShow

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Join us for a vibrant celebration! Free and family-friendly, March 15 from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m.

March 15

Learn More: aurora.ca/WhatsOn

REQUEST FOR EXPRESSION OF INTEREST Licensed Beverage Sales & Service Opportunity

The Town of Aurora is seeking licensed beverage vendors for the **2026 Concerts in the Park** series, taking place on July 8, 15, 22, 29; August 5, 12, 19, 26; and September 2 at Aurora Town Park (49 Wells Street) from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. Each concert attracts an average of 1,000 attendees.

Selected vendors will be responsible for the management, organization, sale, and service of licensed beverages for on-site consumption.

Proposal requirements are available at aurora.ca/SummerConcerts.

Please submit proposals to the Recreation Supervisor, Special Events at sware@aurora.ca by: **April 8, 2026 at 12 p.m. (local time)**.

For questions or additional information, please call 905-726-4762.

Volunteer at the Aurora Farmers Market!

Love local food and community vibes? The Aurora Farmers Market is looking for friendly volunteers for Saturday mornings from May to October!

Help with:

- Greeting visitors
- Vendor set-up/takedown
- Kids' activities
- General event support

Why join us?

Meet great people, support local businesses, and enjoy a fun outdoor atmosphere. Students are welcome!

Sign up: aurora.ca/Volunteers.

Contact: theaurorafarmersmarket@gmail.com.

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 for revised swim schedules and available swim programs during this timeframe. We appreciate your cooperation.

Aurora Town Hall

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Province names Supervisor as it takes control of Catholic Board

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

The Province of Ontario has appointed Carrie Kormos to “supervise” the York Catholic District School Board after the Ministry of Education determined the local Board, along with the Peel District School Board, can’t resolve ongoing problems on their own.

The appointment came Wednesday, March 4, and the Ministry said it follows “serious concerns about infighting and long-term financial unsustainability that risk disrupting learning and undermining student outcomes.

“As part of its plan to protect Ontario and ensure students are prepared for the jobs of tomorrow, these actions will help the Province restore sound financial management at these boards and ensure that every dollar invested is preparing students with practical skills for good-paying, stable careers,” said the Province in a statement.

Added Education Minister Paul Calandra: “After careful review, it is clear that both Peel and York Catholic are facing serious challenges that they cannot resolve on their own. I have appointed supervisors to restore sound management, strengthen oversight, and ensure every decision is focused on protecting student learning and success.”

While school boards – and their futures – have long been a focus of the Ministry, both the York and Peel boards came under closer scrutiny in January when the PDSB was put under Provincial Supervision on a “provisional basis to prevent a mid-year staffing change that could have resulted in uncertainty for parents, students and educators.”

York Catholic wasn’t put on supervision immediately, but was

advised it could be the outcome if they were unable to address “the Board’s significant governance issues [that] were affecting matters of public interest.”

Although the YCDSB had not released a formal statement to families following last week’s decision at press time, they hit back on the idea they couldn’t resolve the issues cited by the Ministry on their own at a Special Board meeting last month led by Maria Iafrate, Chair of the YCDSB, and Jennifer Sarna, Interim Director of Education.

“The Board of Trustees and the Senior Team take this motion seriously,” said Sarna. “But supervision isn’t necessary. Because the goal of every school board is to support student success, and the YCDSB has a proud track record of student achievement. Despite our students’ excellent academic results, we are not complacent. Through our Multi-Year Strategic Plan, the YCDSB continues to implement the supports that students need.”

Iafrate acknowledged turnover in the Director of Education position but, in turn, said Sarna brings “stable, experienced leadership” of nearly 35 years to the table. Governance, she admitted has been “an area of concern” for the Ministry and ongoing governance training within the Board was set to be completed by the end of June.

“The Trustees will use the resources available through the Ontario Education Service Corporation, Ontario Catholic School Trustees’ Association, and the Archdiocese of Toronto, to facilitate the work,” she said. “The training will cover everything we do: trustee roles and responsibilities; financial oversight; strategic decision-making; and how to maintain a unified voice in support of our students. We’re committed to

knowing everything possible about effective governance because we know that is how we will best serve our schools.”

Sarna said it will take time to complete the work, but the Board already has a financial recovery plan in place “that our CFO is confident will meet the government’s timelines, including contingencies to mitigate risks.”

“We believe our students matter,” Iafrate concluded. “Our staff matters, and the constitutional protections that allow Catholic school boards to be governed according to our faith matters, too. Catholic school trustees are essential for keeping Catholic schools Catholic. Yes, we handle the same governance work that any school board trustee does, but we also carry the responsibility of keeping Christ at the centre of everything our schools do.

“That work requires trustees who actually understand Catholic teaching and can apply it to governance decisions. When decisions are made, Catholic trustees protect the distinctive identity that parents chose when they sent their children to Catholic schools. This is not work you can outsource or replace with ministerial oversight. It requires people who are called to serve in this specific way. This takes people with both the competence to govern and the faith to lead.”

Upon Kormos’ appointment as Supervisor, the Ministry said she was a “seasoned advisor with over 30 years of experience supporting executive teams and boards in Canada’s government, gaming, hospitality, and tourism sectors.”

“Ms. Kormos has previously advised Ministers and Premiers, and has also served as Chief Marketing and Communications Officer at one of Canada’s largest hospitality

companies,” said the Ministry, noting she currently serves as Director for Invest Ontario and the Canadian Gaming Association.

As Supervisor, Kormos is tasked with taking “measures to enable the Board to provide financial stewardship and good governance in the interests of all students of the Board, including addressing the in-year deficit in a manner that ensures that students’ learning environments remain stable and that financial decisions support – not disrupt – classroom learning.”

“The Supervisor will work with senior Board leadership to build Board financial and governance capacity and ensure the implementation of appropriate measures to address the in-year deficit. In doing so, the Supervisor will: assist the government in restoring public confidence; assess the operational inefficiencies and opportunities to improve resource allocation; review saving opportunities to inform the development and implementation of a plan to return the Board to a balanced financial position while protecting the best interest of students; enhance financial oversight and governance by promoting transparency and ensuring accountability in financial operations; provide accountable, transparent, and effective governance, and increasing alignment between governance and administration; respect the Board’s collective agreements and other financial contracts and legally-binding obligations; defer to the Board’s trustees in relation to denominational matters (and non-denominational matters required to maintain denominational character); and report progress on these actions to the Ministry of Education at the times and in the manner directed by the Ministry.”

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TOWN OF AURORA
PUBLIC NOTICE



NOTICE OF PUBLIC PLANNING MEETING

AURORA TOWN COUNCIL will hold a Public Meeting to receive input on a proposed Official Plan and Zoning By-law Amendment application:

Tuesday, March 24, 2026 at 7 p.m.

Aurora Town Hall, Council Chambers, 100 John West Way, Aurora Ontario

APPLICATION: The Applicant proposes to amend the Official Plan and Zoning By-law to facilitate a 36-unit townhouse condominium development (20 standard and 16 back-to-back units) on the western portion of the lands currently designated as Community Commercial and zoned as Rural.

This proposal will include amendments to the approved ZBA-2022-06 on the eastern portion of the lands. The proposed increase in density will remove 8 standard Townhouses and replacing them with 16 back-to-back townhouse development.

Access is proposed via the Stronach Aurora Recreation Complex driveway and requires an amendment to the approved Site Plan application (SP-2022-10) to gain access onto Wellington Street East.

PROPERTY: 1426 & 1452 Wellington Street East
LEGAL DESCRIPTION: Lots 1 & 4, Plan 525
APPLICANT: Land Services Group Inc.
FILE NUMBERS: OPA-2025-10, ZBA-2025-09, and ZBA-2022-06
RELATED APPLICATION: SP-2022-10
WARD: 6



PROCEDURAL INFORMATION:

Parties interested in speaking during the public portion of the meeting may attend in person or electronically. To participate electronically, pre-registration is required. For more information, visit: aurora.ca/participation

The meeting will be live streamed at: [youtube.com/TownofAurora](https://www.youtube.com/TownofAurora)

The Planning Report will be made available the Tuesday before the Public Planning Meeting date on the Town’s website, by visiting the Agendas and Minutes section, located at: aurora.ca/agendas

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

Any questions regarding the proposed application can be directed to Felix Chau of the Planning and Development Services Department at 365-500-3105, or by email at fchau@aurora.ca.

Comments may also be mailed to the Planning and Development Services Department at 100 John West Way, Aurora, ON. L4G 6J1, faxed to 905-726-4736, or emailed to planning@aurora.ca prior to the meeting. Please quote the File Name and Number.

PERSONAL INFORMATION COLLECTION NOTICE:

The Town of Aurora collects personal information in communications or presentations made to Town Council and/or its Committees under the legal authority of the Planning Act, R.S.O. 1990, Chapter C.13, as amended. Pursuant to Section 27 of the Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, R.S.O. 1990, c. M.56, as amended, (the “Act”) public feedback to planning proposals is considered to be public record and may be disclosed to any individual upon request in accordance with the Act. If you are submitting letters, faxes, emails, presentations or other communications to the Town, you should be aware that your name and the fact that you communicated with the Town will become part of the public record and will appear on the Town’s website. The Town will also make your communication and any personal information in it, such as your address and postal code or email address available to the public unless you expressly request the Town to remove it. Questions about this collection should be directed to the Town Clerk, Town of Aurora, 100 John West Way, Box 1000, Aurora, ON L4G 6J1 905-727-3123.

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The Town audio and/or video records Public Planning Meetings. If you make a presentation to Town Council or its Committees, you may be audio or video recorded. Pursuant to Section 27 of the Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, R.S.O. 1990, c. M.56, as amended, (the “Act”) public feedback to planning proposals is considered to be a public record and may be disclosed to any individual upon request in accordance with the Act.

DATED at the Town of Aurora, this 12th day of March, 2026

Town of Aurora 100 John West Way, Aurora, ON L4G 6J1
aurora.ca/publicnotices • 905-727-1375

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

York Region launches Reel Recipes Video Contest for youth and promotes home cooking

York Region is celebrating Nutrition Month this March with two key initiatives that encourage residents to cook at home: the Let's Cook campaign and the new Reel Recipes Video Contest for youth.

Let's Cook: Encouraging Everyone to Get in the Kitchen

Let's Cook reminds people that cooking is something anyone can do, no matter their age or skill level. Even small tasks—like washing vegetables, stirring a pot or helping set up ingredients—can bring families together and help build important life skills.

Cooking at home has many benefits:

- It builds confidence as people learn new skills or try new recipes;
- It doesn't require fancy tools—basic kitchen items are enough;
- It supports healthier eating because you can control how much salt, sugar, and fat you use;
- It helps families celebrate traditions and explore foods from different cultures;
- It reduces waste when you plan meals and choose seasonal, local ingredients;
- It brings people together and sharing a home cooked meal is an easy way to connect.

Residents are encouraged to start small, learn as they go and enjoy the process. Tips and simple recipes are available at york.ca/LetsCook.

Reel Recipes Video Contest for Youth

York Region is launching the Reel Recipes Nutrition Video Contest from March 1 to April 30, 2026. The contest is open to youth aged 14–18 who live or attend a secondary school in York Region.

Students are invited to tell their kitchen story by creating a 60–90 second video that shows:

- A recipe they enjoy making;
- A cooking skill they've learned;
- How they stay safe in the kitchen;
- A food tradition or cultural dish that matters to them;
- A tip or trick that makes cooking easy or fun;
- Entries will be judged by a panel of students, with prizes awarded to the top three submissions.

Share your recipe, your culture and your creativity and enter at york.ca/ReelRecipes

Region of York

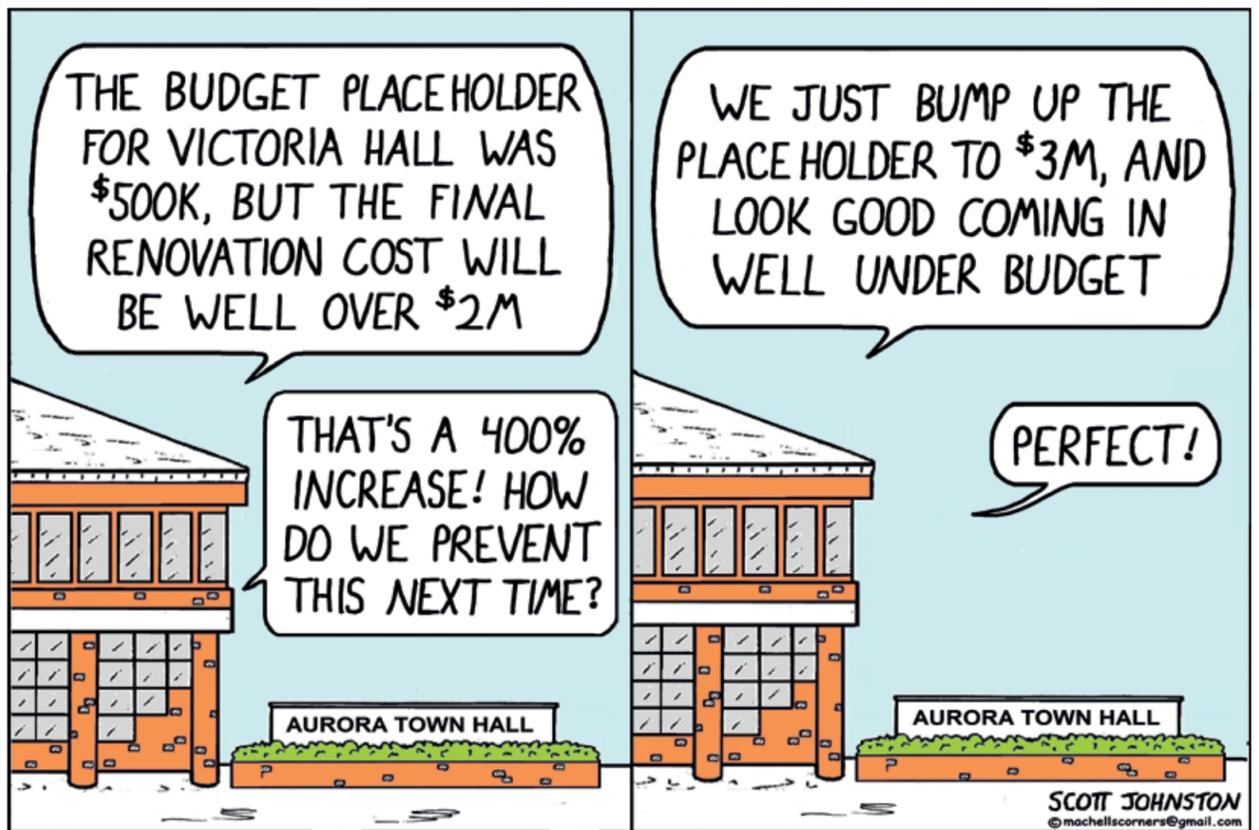
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To submit a letter to the editor, please send your email to brock@lpcmedia.ca Deadline for submissions is Sunday at 1 p.m.

Machell's Corners



Commonwealth, Common Goals



BROCK'S BANTER

Brock Weir

Much has been said in recent weeks about Canada's place in the world.

Actually, Canada's place in the world, and just what exactly that entails, has been a point of discussion, debate, and, yes, contention, since the very establishment of this country by Confederation in 1867.

While we Canadians, I believe, generally have a strong sense of self at the individual level, that's not always the case in the broader picture, and we're reminded of this from time to time.

Prior to the outbreak of the present war in Iran, one of the most potent immediate reasons for considering Canadian identity and this country's place in the world was ongoing economical and philosophical conflict with the United States, once one of our most trusted allies.

The question of what it means to be Canadian in a global context was posed well beyond Canada earlier this year when Prime Minister Mark Carney delivered his now-famous speech at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, where he called on middle powers like Canada to find strength in common ground.

"We are in the midst of a rupture, not a transition," said Carney on the international rules-based order. "Over the past two decades, a series of crises in finance, health, energy and geopolitics have laid bare the risks of extreme global integration. But more recently, great powers have begun using economic integration as weapons, tariffs as leverage, financial infrastructure as coercion, supply chains as vulnerabilities to be exploited.

"The multilateral institutions on which middle powers have relied — the WTO, the UN, the COP — the very architecture of collective problem solving, are under threat. And as a result, many countries are drawing the same conclusions: that they must develop greater strategic autonomy: in energy, food, critical minerals, in finance and supply chains. And this impulse is understandable. A country that cannot feed itself, fuel itself, or defend itself has few options. When the rules no longer protect you, you must protect yourself. But let's be clear-eyed about where this leads: a world of fortresses will be poorer, more fragile and less sustainable....

"Middle powers must act together because if we're not at the table, we're on the menu. But I'd also say that great powers can afford, for now, to go it alone. They have the market size, the military capacity and the leverage to dictate terms. Middle powers do not. But when we only negotiate bilaterally with a hegemon, we negotiate from weakness. We accept what's offered. We compete with each other to be the most

accommodating. This is not sovereignty. It's the performance of sovereignty while accepting subordination. In a world of great power rivalry, the countries in between have a choice: compete with each other for favour or to combine to create a third path with impact. We shouldn't allow the rise of hard power to blind us to the fact that the power of legitimacy, integrity and rules will remain strong — if we choose to wield them together."

Underscoring this point, the Prime Minister said, "We know the old order is not coming back. We shouldn't mourn it. Nostalgia is not a strategy."

Nostalgia for our previous relationship with the United States is certainly not a strategy, I think we can all agree, but are there also opportunities in what so many consider to be nostalgia?

Monday was Commonwealth Day, an annual celebration held in the United Kingdom and in many parts of the world on the second Monday in March to celebrate the heritage, close bonds, and shared visions for the future of the more than 50 member states, most of which, but not all, have roots within the former British Empire.

It's a day that hardly causes a ripple in Canada, yet one that should be given much more significance.

Some might see this collection of member states that is the Commonwealth — several of which are considered "middle powers" — as, at best, an exercise in nostalgia for what once was (and, in many respects, what was once... well, was far from great), but it doesn't need to be. It's a global platform to share ideas and look to the future in conversations that aren't dominated by geopolitical behemoths.

It's an organization that, in addition to Canada and the United Kingdom, includes Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and more, along with scores of emerging nations and economies in the Caribbean and Central America, many parts of Africa, Asia, and the Oceanic

states.

We might not all see the world in the same way, but given our common roots, each member of the Commonwealth has a bit of a head start in understanding where each other has come from, where each other is headed — and in forging or renewing links, that is often half the battle.

These links were not only demonstrated at the start of the week at Westminster Abbey as representatives from member states joined the King and Queen, High Commissioners from each member nation, cultural representatives and more in a cavalcade in what brings this disparate group of countries together, but also in Canberra, Australia, when the Prime Minister of Canada made a rare speech before the Australian Parliament — fresh off his visit to another member state, India.

"For us, as two democracies in an age of polarisation, as two dynamic trading nations in a time of disrupted supply chains, and as two middle powers in an era of strategic competition, Australia and Canada must seek and create new ways to stand with and for each other," said Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, welcoming Carney into Parliament. "For all the comfortable ties of old affection, what makes the friendship between Australia and Canada noteworthy is what we do not share. We do not share a border, a region, a hemisphere, or any market smaller than the global one. Yet this makes the connection between our countries more meaningful, not less, because our cooperation, our partnership, is a positive choice, not a necessity....

"When we act together, we demonstrate to our citizens that government is not a passive institution. It is an instrument for positive change. And what's more, when we send a message to all those nations that look to us as equals, as peers, as neighbours, and as leaders, that they too have a choice, agency, and a part to play, because peace, security, and prosperity are not the preserve of the great powers alone. They are our common cause and our collective responsibility."

Hopefully this is the start of a new era of understanding and cooperation between a unique group of nations that have an understanding of each other, face common challenges, and can forge unique solutions together.

Some might find the Commonwealth as simply a nostalgic vestige of our history, but, to my mind, it offers significant opportunity that has been all too often overlooked.

Here's to our shared futures, if we take advantage of them!

THE AURORAN
Aurora's Community Newspaper

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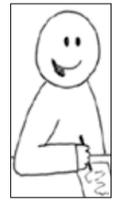
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THE AURORA MUSEUM & ARE

Feeling Sweeepy!



INSIDE AURORA

Scott Johnston

Sandy Claws

After months of waiting, the Big Melt is finally on in Aurora, as the winter of 2025-26 winds down after what I expect we all feel is a long-overstayed welcome.

While Town staff and Mother Nature work to reduce the persistent piles of snow blocking curbs, roads, bus stops, parking lots, sidewalks and intersection sightlines, our asphalt and concrete surfaces are slowly reappearing. Or at least, they would be if they weren't covered in so much sand.

The Town, both understandably and liberally, applies this throughout the winter to help make driving and walking a little safer. Of course, this has to be done anew every time it snows. The result is that over the winter, these surfaces accumulate a lot of this gritty anti-slip deterrent.

Fortunately, in the spring, usually around mid-April, crews will start out in street sweepers and their sidewalk equivalents clearing it up. Based on my observations in previous years, it's impressive how effective this process is.

If the Town is looking to save some funds this spring, however, I suggest that they may not need to do as thorough a job in our neighbourhood, at least on the sidewalks. That's because most of the accumulated sand on these has been brought into our house over the past two weeks by our dog.

She's not big, but she's furry, and every time we go for a walk, her feet, legs and tummy get soaked by the meltwater on the sidewalks. Cleaning her off when we come inside, I think I'm just drying her, but she's picked up more than just water in our travels. As she completely dries over the next hour or so, everywhere she goes in the house she deposits small piles of gritty sand.

This repeats itself multiple times each day... every day.

We know it's from the sidewalks, as she has minimal yard time these days, and in any case, our yard does not consist of sand.

We do not seem to be alone in feeling this impact. Chatting with another dog walker the other day I commented on how nice it will be when winter ends, and in a haunted voice with an expression to match, she said "the sand!" She sounded alarmingly like the character of Kurtz in Heart of Darkness saying "the horror!"

Dealing with the accumulating sand in the house is another challenge. Cleaning up after the dog the other day actually overloaded our vacuum, causing it to shut down with a pathetic gasping wheeze. Fortunately, it was revived after the removal of enough sand from the filter to fill Petch House to a depth of several centimetres.

As for solutions, our dog is not a fan of clothing, so wearing boots outside won't help the situation, and besides, she'd still kick it up onto other parts of her body. Neither of us are excited about her getting baths every few weeks, let alone the few times a day that would be necessary this time of year. And while I could carry her, that kind of defeats the purpose of a walk, at least for her.

So, I guess until the street cleaning crews start their work next month we'll just have to grin, or perhaps the best word is "grit", and bear it. With luck, both the vacuum and my sanity will hold out for another few weeks.

Gallery Show

A reminder that if you'd like to see some of my favourite non-editorial cartoons blown up larger than screen size, the Aurora Public Library is hosting a display in their second-floor gallery until March 28. Feel free to drop by anytime during regular library hours.

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



America by many retailers through the first few decades of the 20th century, with our example likely ordered through the mail from the T. Eaton Co. Sweep easy, Aurora!



GETTING THINGS DONE

Mayor
Tom Mrakas

As York Region's representative, I was honoured to be in Washington, D.C., last week with fellow mayors and leaders from across Canada and the United States through the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative. We met with dozens of members of Congress to discuss the future of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River region.

For communities like Aurora and across York Region, this conversation is particularly relevant.

The Great Lakes are the source of our drinking water. The water that flows from the lakes through regional infrastructure ultimately supplies our

homes, businesses, and families every single day. Protecting these waters is about public health, environmental stewardship, and long-term water security for millions of people.

We also discussed the importance of cross-border trade and the impacts of tariffs. The Great Lakes-St. Lawrence region represents one of the most integrated economic corridors in the

world, supporting millions of jobs and billions of dollars in trade between Canada and the United States. When tariffs or trade barriers are introduced, communities on both sides of the border feel the impact — including businesses and supply chains right here in York Region.

That's why maintaining a strong Canada-U.S. partnership and open dialogue is critical. Municipal leaders are often the first to see how these decisions affect local economies, industries, and families — and I am proud to build and strengthen relationships with my US counterparts to ensure Aurora and York Region are part of the dialogue.

OPINION

BY DAVID SUZUKI

Canada's government has been silent about the United States killing people on boats off the Venezuela coast. Whether or not the boats were being used to transport drugs (and there's no evidence they were), these appalling acts have been labelled "war crimes" — or "murders," since no war has been officially declared ... yet.

The U.S. administration first claimed the boats were transporting fentanyl, but Venezuela doesn't produce or supply much, if any, of the drug. U.S. President Donald Trump also used alleged fentanyl smuggling from Canada to justify imposing heavy tariffs on us.

The U.S. has since said the boats were carrying cocaine and/or that those aboard were "terrorists." Trump has also indicated the U.S. could invade Venezuela. At least nine warships — including "aircraft carriers, guided-missile destroyers, and amphibious assault ships capable of landing thousands of troops" — along with nuclear-powered submarines and fighter and spy planes, are positioned within striking range of the South American country, the BBC reports.

If it isn't drugs, and it likely isn't that Venezuela is run by an autocratic, ostensibly socialist government (which the U.S. has also labelled "terrorist"), what is it about?

Consider what Canada and Venezuela have in common. As is often the case, it's about oil.

Venezuela sits on the largest proven reserves in the world — about 300 billion barrels — most of it "extra heavy" oilsands oil. Canada has slightly more than half that amount in its

oilsands, but of denser bitumen.

Since his 2024 election, Trump and his cronies have been eyeing fossil fuel and critical mineral resources from South America to Canada to Greenland. Some in the U.S. are making no secret of the real goal in Venezuela.

"Venezuela for the American oil companies will be a field day because it will be more than a trillion dollars in economic activity," Republican Representative Maria Salazar recently told Fox Business. "The Venezuelans have the largest reserves of oil in the world, more than Saudi Arabia. This is going to be a windfall for us when it comes to fossil fuels."

People in the U.S. and worldwide are rightly dismayed by the boat killings, but the bigger picture is more disturbing.

"To initiate a war of aggression is not only an international crime, it is the supreme international crime differing from other war crimes in that it contains within itself the accumulated evil of the whole," Associate U.S. Supreme Court Justice and Chief Prosecutor Robert Jackson said at the start of the Nuremberg Military Tribunal of Nazi war criminals.

Beyond war crimes, invading and killing for the sake of polluting, climate-altering fuels and the oligarchs that profit from them is a crime against humanity.

United Nations Secretary General António Guterres has rightly stated, "Our addiction to fossil fuels is pushing humanity to the brink. We face a stark choice: Either we stop it — or it stops us. We are digging our own graves."

The oil, gas and coal interests that still exercise tremendous influence over global economies are becoming

desperate in the face of a shifting reality. Renewable energy — from sun, wind, geothermal and energy storage — is now more efficient and much cheaper than fossil fuel energy, with costs dropping rapidly as dirty fuel costs rise. Renewable energy also allows for greater energy independence and stability and more equitable distribution of benefits.

The accelerating impacts of global heating are impossible to ignore or deny: floods, droughts, water shortages, agricultural failures, plant and animal extinctions, increasing heat, and extreme weather-related illness, death and migration crises.

The Trump administration demonstrates the desperation and stupidity of this fossil-fuelled madness. The president has called climate change a "hoax" and has promoted fossil fuel expansion while overturning small but significant gains his country has made on climate policy and regulation.

Why has Canada been silent about the recent boat attacks? We could be next in the crosshairs. Is it part of our prime minister's strategy to not "poke the bear"? Or is it because Canada remains a major player in the insane global push to continue exploiting a dirty, outmoded fuel — albeit one that could be incredibly valuable if used more wisely and sparingly?

Regardless, it's time for Canada to step up and help lead the necessary and growing transition from fossil fuels to safer, healthier, cleaner energy.

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



Happy St. Patrick's Day

Today, we celebrate Irish Heritage Day in Ontario and recognize the rich traditions, culture, and contributions of the Irish community across our province and here in Newmarket—Aurora.

Blessings

May your troubles be less, and your blessings be more, and nothing but happiness come through your door.



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MP SANDRA COBENA'S UPDATE

Sandra Cobena, MP
Newmarket-Aurora

Why CUSMA matters for businesses in Newmarket-Aurora

Later this month, I will travel to Washington, D.C. as part of the ParlAmericas delegation to the Organization of American States, where parliamentarians from across the Americas gather to discuss trade and economic cooperation. While these conversations take place on the international stage, the interests I represent are very much local.

Newmarket-Aurora is home to many hardworking entrepreneurs, manufacturers, and small businesses that help power our local economy. While many serve customers right here in our community, a surprising number are also connected to supply chains that stretch across North America.

That's where the Canada-United States-Mexico Agreement (CUSMA) comes in.

Trade between Canada and the US represents a \$1.3-trillion annual relationship, with \$3.6 billion in goods and services crossing the border daily. CUSMA governs how goods move between our countries, ensuring that most products can cross borders without tariffs or major barriers.

For Canadian businesses, this means stable access to our most important export market. In fact, about three-quarters of Canadian exports go to the United States. For many small and medium-sized businesses, access to that market creates opportunities to grow, hire, and invest.

Here in Newmarket-Aurora and across York Region, many companies operate in manufacturing, technology, agriculture, and services. Some of the products they create cross borders multiple times before becoming finished goods.

Agreements like CUSMA help ensure those supply chains continue to function smoothly.

In 2026, the agreement will undergo a significant review. If your business relies on access to international markets, please let me know so I can ensure I represent its interests. You can email me at sandra.cobena@parl.gc.ca.



Members of Regional Council and staff are pictured with a York Region Transit bus, specially wrapped to mark the transit service's 25th anniversary, following Thursday's Council meeting. Photo courtesy of the Region of York

York Region Transit marks quarter-century of keeping people moving

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

York Region Transit celebrated a milestone anniversary last week as it marked 25 years of keeping the Region moving.

The month-long celebration of the local transit service began Thursday, March 5, following a meeting of Regional Council, with the unveiling of a specially-wrapped YRT bus and the launch of a new display of historic memorabilia and transit-related artefacts at the Regional Headquarters on Yonge Street.

The party continued Saturday morning with a family open house at its Newmarket Operations and Maintenance Facility.

If you missed it, celebrations will continue with an open house on Saturday, March 21, at their Richmond Hill facility located at 55 Orlando Avenue.

"YRT was established in 2001, merging the transit systems of the

Towns of Aurora and Newmarket, and Cities of Markham, Vaughan, and Richmond Hill to create a unified service across the Region," said the Regional Municipality of York in a statement. "Today, YRT provides York Region with a comprehensive family of services consisting of Viva rapid transit, Local, Express, and School Special routes, as well as On-Request and door-to-door Paratransit services. The vast network provides transit services to 1.29 million residents over a large geographic area, including urban, suburban, and rural communities.

"Since amalgamation in 2001, YRT ridership has increased more than 300 per cent from 7.7 million to 24.7 million in 2024. YRT's progress over the past 25 years is an achievement made possible through the support of York Regional Council, together with the work of staff, community partners, and transit users."

Celebrations of the YRT's milestone will continue in various ways beyond March.

The archival display will be available at Regional Headquarters through April 30 and, in the meantime, York Region Transit is hoping to hear from you.

"As we celebrate this milestone, we'd love to hear the moments that made transit meaningful to you, whether it was your first bus ride as a child, a quiet moment on your daily commute, or a pleasantly unexpected encounter that left a lasting impression," they say.

Anyone who wants to share their story are invited to do so in writing or in a video submission for inclusion on their Memory Wall located at yrt.ca/Celebrate25.

Participants will be entered into a monthly random draw to win one of nine YRT Prize Packs, which includes an anniversary jersey, a \$25 Presto card, a card holder, and more.

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BUSINESS & FINANCE



Stormwater charges put some small- and medium-sized businesses in financial jeopardy: manager

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Stormwater charges placed on plazas may put some small and medium-sized businesses in financial jeopardy, claims the manager of St. Andrew's Village.

The Town of Aurora is now looking at how stormwater charges are applied to businesses in plazas and shopping centres after tenants at St. Andrew's Village raised concerns earlier this year.

After these concerns were raised at Council, Ward 1 Councillor Ron Weese put forward a motion tasking staff to take a closer look at the situation, not just for tenants in the popular plaza in Aurora's northwest, but across the municipality as well.

"Currently we have at the plaza a very unique situation where the plaza is divided up into many, many units and each unit as small as I would say 800 square feet up until 20,000-plus square feet, [has] their own water metre," property manager Ari Hofstetter told Council. "A lot of these tenants don't use a lot of water; they maybe use their washroom a few times a day and regardless of the water usage, the charge from the Town for the stormwater, which I understand is a fixed water metre charge, has been escalating over the last few years."

When he began managing the property "four or five years ago," quarterly bills would be between \$100 and \$200, but some bills have now reached upwards of \$420, he

said.

"These tenants that are already struggling under economic conditions and we're living with very tight economic conditions right now, especially retailers," he contended. "They've been pleading with me for years already, but now it's come to a point where it is just not manageable. I'm pleading on their behalf if the Town can do anything to somehow provide relief with these fixed water metre charges."

"If we have no choice, I really don't want to go this route, but...for lack of any other solution, we may have to switch to bulk metre for the whole plaza, which would cut out those costs for the tenants. However, that's definitely not the preferred method. Such a method would result in quite a loss for the Town, probably over \$100,000 annually, just adding up all the water metre charges. I think it would be in the interest for both tenants and the Town if we can come towards some kind of middle ground where they're still paying the water metre charges, but with some kind of relief."

Council passed a motion looking into doing just that at their most recent meeting.

In his motion, Councillor Weese recognized the concerns of tenants, stating that the fixed-rate stormwater charges "create a disproportionate financial burden on small and medium-sized local businesses as they pay the same as larger businesses, particularly in the context of rising operating costs."

"The St. Andrew's Shopping Centre is a unique and long-established commercial hub within the Town of Aurora that provides essential goods, services, and employment opportunities to the community," said Councillor Weese in his motion. "Municipal stormwater billing structures can be reviewed and adjusted through Council policy direction where unique site-specific or economic circumstances exist. Council has an interest in supporting the sustainability and economic vitality of local commercial tenants while maintaining fiscal responsibility and cost recovery principles for municipal services."

The motion tasks staff with reviewing the concerns of St. Andrew's tenants, analysing options to reduce or eliminate such charges, assess the financial, operational, and

legal implications of any proposed changes, including impacts on the Town's stormwater rate-supported budget; and consider if "similar relief measures may apply to other comparable commercial plazas or tenant configurations within Aurora."

"St. Andrews Village is a unique shopping centre and a valued business centre in Town," said Councillor Weese introducing the motion at the Council table. "Tenants have expressed their concern over their viability. We ought to think about them. In Aurora, we value the shopping centre and the economic viability of all their tenants and supporting their businesses. I believe this is an example of where our ability to make the site-specific policy changes can be made, and I ask for support for this motion from my Council colleagues."

Heritage grant will help rehabilitate historic "Bunker House"

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

An unassuming-looking local home from 1875 which could have played a pivotal role in Ontario history in a worst-case-scenario will soon see preservation efforts supported by the Town of Aurora.

The Bunker House, which was purchased by Metropolitan Toronto in 1962 and retrofitted with a concrete bunker to serve as an alternative seat of municipal operations, if necessary, during the Cold War, will receive a \$10,000 Heritage Grant, following Council approval last week.

Located at 220 Old Yonge Street, The Cold War Bunker is seeing "significant weather damage" as the result of failed sealing and waterproofing and a roof leak. The homeowners' application for a Heritage Grant was supported in December by the Town's Heritage Advisory Committee.

Aurora's Heritage Grant program was established in April of 2025 to help owners of heritage properties maintain them for years to come.

There is an annual cap of \$30,000 for the fund, and money can be used to maintain heritage features, remove graffiti, repair original windows, doors, and other elements, reconstruct lost architectural features, and façade restoration.

Applicants are required to provide two contractor quotes.

"220 Old Yonge Street is individually designated under Bylaw 5905-16 and was originally built circa 1875," says Heritage Planner Adam Robb in his recommendation to Council.

"Purchased by Metro Toronto in 1962, a concrete bunker was then added to the main building, which also features an emergency escape port. The bunker contains several relics from the Cold War, including an illuminated map of Metro Toronto evacuation routes and telecommunications lines.

"Historically, the house is associated with the Parteger and Cosford families, who farmed the property and the surrounding lands. After the purchase by Metro Toronto, the property became a significant readiness centre in case of a nuclear attack on Toronto. The property continued to serve as a training centre until the early 1990s. The designation bylaw specifically lists the underground bunker and associated relics, such as the illuminated map and emergency water tanks as heritage attributes."

The grant was formally approved by Council on February 24, with Ward 3 Councillor Wendy Gaertner praising current and former property owners for keeping the property up as well as they have.

"The owners of the property are here tonight [and] I thank them for coming and taking such good care of this heritage property," said Councillor Gaertner at the approval stage, noting the previous owners' work to receive heritage designation for their property. "They actually designated this house just before they sold it and people don't do that because it reduces the value of the property, or it would have in this case. They felt it was a significant heritage property and designated.... [and] I wish more people would do things like that."

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Proposed renoviction bylaw could prove costly for Aurora, caution staff

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

A proposal to bring forward a bylaw giving the Town of Aurora more authority on renovictions could prove costly, staff caution.

This week, Council will consider a recommendation from staff not to proceed with developing a bylaw protecting residents against renovictions.

Council tasked staff with looking into the issue last fall following a motion from Ward 1 Councillor Ron Weese, but they cite potential costs and potential changes to Ontario's Residential Tenancies Act as reasons to shelve the idea at a local level.

"Proposed amendments to the Residential Tenancies Act, 2006, introduced through the Helping Homebuyers, Protecting Tenants Act, 2023, are intended to strengthen the authority of the Landlord and Tenant Board to address renovictions by enhancing notice requirements and reinforcing tenant protections," says Alexander Wray, Aurora's Manager of Bylaw Services, in a report set to come before Council at this week's Committee

of the Whole meeting. "If proclaimed in force, landlords issuing notices of termination for extensive repairs or renovations would be required to submit a report prepared by a qualified professional confirming that the proposed work is sufficiently extensive to require both a building permit and a vacant possession. Failure to meet this requirement would render the notice void.

"The amendments would also reinforce a tenant's right of first refusal following renovations, requiring landlords to provide timely written updates to tenants who elect to return, including estimated completion dates, notice of any changes to those timelines, and confirmation when the unit is ready for re-occupancy. Tenants would be afforded a minimum of 60 days to re-occupy the unit once it is deemed ready, and rent would remain subject to applicable lawful rent controls."

While Councillor Weese said he initially brought the motion forward due to a couple of real-world examples of renovictions within his ward, Wray's report says renovictions are "not a prominent issue" in Aurora, noting a total of seven formal notices to terminate

a tenancy based on the criteria for renovictions had been filed between January 1, 2021 and December 31, 2025.

Should Council decide to forge ahead with a renoviction bylaw this month, Wray says establishing such mechanisms would require additional municipal staff and could impact the tax rate.

"At the time of preparing this report, only two Ontario municipalities – the City of Hamilton and the City of Toronto – have implemented renovation and relocation, or similar, bylaws intended to address renovictions," says Wray. "To support enforcement of its licencing program, which came into effect on January 1, 2025, the City of Hamilton approved 25 new positions, including management and supervisory staff, clerical and legal support, outreach personnel, and municipal law enforcement officers. The City of Toronto has also adopted a renovation and relocation bylaw, which came into effect on July 31, 2025, and has identified the need for 14 additional positions, consisting of eight Toronto Building staff to manage inquiries and licensing functions, and six Building Inspectors to conduct inspections and

investigations.

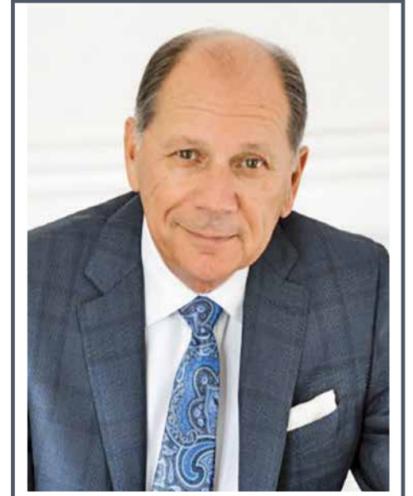
"In addition to Hamilton and Toronto, the feasibility of implementing renoviction-related bylaws has been reviewed by municipal councils in St. Catharines and Waterloo. In both cases, staff reports did not recommend implementation, citing considerations such as operational complexity, staffing and financial impacts, and the limited anticipated effectiveness relative to existing provincial enforcement mechanisms.

"The City of Mississauga is currently studying the issue of renovictions and related policy tools; however, no decision regarding implementation has been made at the time of preparing this report."



INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY – The Canadian Federation of University Women Aurora-Newmarket marked International Women's Day with a day of activities in Newmarket on Friday. The program began with a lunch at Trinity United Church, including a keynote address from Ellen Campbell, founder of Abuse Hurts, followed by a walk down Main Street, culminating at the Water Street bridge where members gathered to sing O Canada.

Auroran photo by Diane Buchanan



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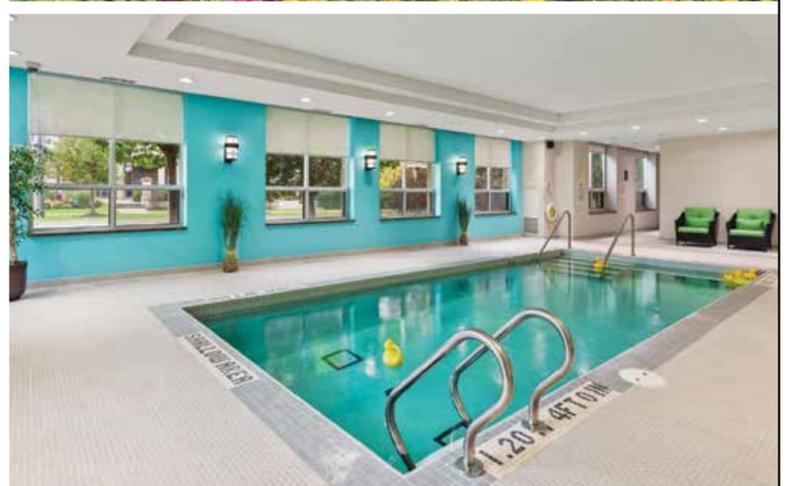
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Aurora Town Square comes to life this month with bursts of colour, nostalgia

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Spring is just around the corner and Aurora Town Square is ready to welcome a busy month with a huge splash of colour.

This Sunday, March 15, Aurora Town Square will host the Town's second-annual Holi Festival.

The celebration this year builds on the success of the inaugural event in 2025,

expanding popular Bollywood-themed dance programs and colourful cavalcades for that were a hit with the community.

"We had incredibly positive feedback last year, so of course we wanted to bring it back again this year," says Nichole Campsall, Cultural Development Coordinator for the Town of Aurora. "We're kicking it off with a Bollywood dance workshop hosted by Karishma, who is absolutely incredible. Because we

Sharon Hampson, right, is pictured with daughter Randi.

Photo courtesy of Aurora Town Square



had such a great turnout last year in the Dance Studio, we've moved it this year into the Performance Hall. From 10 a.m. to 10.45, we're all going to gather in the Performance Hall for an energetic, interactive, fun Bollywood dance workshop and then, at 10.30 a.m., we will open up activities downstairs at the Café level."

Activities on the café level, she says, include children's crafts, a photo booth, and complimentary samosas while supplies last.

The morning of fun concludes in a spectacular fashion: colour-throwing in the outdoor square.

"Some participants who came up to us last year just mentioned that they hadn't had this type of community celebration for Holi in quite a few years, so it was a very emotional experience just to see the families together celebrating pure joy and happiness," says Campsall. "We did see those who would traditionally celebrate Holi and there were a lot of community members who had never celebrated it before and who were dancing, colour-throwing, and just celebrating – and it was a great community experience."

The celebratory atmosphere will continue on Saturday, March 21, when generations will be thrilled to spend the day with Sharon Hampson of the iconic music group Sharon, Lois & Bram.

Hampson will be hosted jointly by Aurora Town Square and the Aurora Public Library.

A family-friendly Storybook Singalong and Meet and Greet with Sharon, her daughter Randi, and grandson Ethan will take place at 10.30 a.m. in the Aurora Public Library. There, Hampson will also host a book signing before taking the Performance Hall stage at 2 p.m. in conversation with Andrew Applebaum of the Toronto Legends podcast.

"We're so thrilled to be able to partner with the Library on this, another very important community partner that we just collaborate with at every opportunity," says Campsall. "We know that certainly Sharon, Lois and Bram will resonate amazing childhood memories with so many members of our community. I definitely watched Sharon, Lois and Bram and listened to the music – everybody knows The Elephant Show! This is a great opportunity, not only for those of us in the generation that has those special childhood memories, but also for us to share it with our children. I think there's a really special nostalgia to that."

"We're just so excited that this opportunity came to us and really excited to see the community come out, the questions that they have and how it all kind of comes together. We're very lucky that this opportunity came to us. We're very excited."

The Aurora Public Library is not the only community partnership that will take centre-stage this month.

On Thursday, March 19, the Aurora Museum & Archives will join forces with the Aurora Historical Society to host Toronto's Lost Shipwreck, a presentation by Heison Chak.

"Uncover the hidden history resting beneath Lake Ontario," say organizers. "This presentation 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 bring maritime heritage to life—showing that world-class discovery can begin right close to home."

For a full roster of March programs at Aurora Town Square, as well as ticketing and registration information, visit aurora.ca/whatson.

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We're decking the halls once again and inviting unique, passionate vendors to join us in making HollyFest even more magical in its second year. After an incredible inaugural event, we're excited to welcome new businesses and continue growing Orangeville Citizen's signature holiday shopping experience.

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Warm wishes to everyone celebrating St. Patrick's Day



MICHAEL PARSA, MPP
Aurora–Oak Ridges–Richmond Hill

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Creativity set to be unleashed at Aurora's Youth Innovation Fair

BY BROCK WEIR
 EDITOR
 LOCAL JOURNALISM
 INITIATIVE REPORTER

Put on your thinking caps and get that creativity flowing as the Town of Aurora is now accepting student registrations for the 2026 Youth Innovation Fair.

Set for Wednesday, May 13, York Region students in Grades 4 to 12 are invited to register for the event to “showcase their creativity through innovative ideas and real-world problem-solving,” particularly in the areas of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math), social innovation, robotics, gaming, e-sports, green technology, and more.

Students can register as individuals or as a group.

“We’re really looking at innovations that focus on STEM, social innovation, robotics, gaming e-sports, green tech, and more, but we also don’t want to focus too much on that so students only think their innovations have to fit those categories; we really want as much open-mindedness and creativity as possible – and we all know with the youth there is no shortage of creativity. It’s always quite exciting to see what comes in from our youth,” says Shelley Ware, Special Events Coordinator for the Town of Aurora.”

What helps take student submissions to the next level, adds Erin Hamilton, Sport and Community Development Specialist for the Town of Aurora, is “passion for their innovation.”

“I think it really speaks to the energy they put in and when they have a direct link to the passion and a connection to what they’re developing, they really spend a lot of time working through how that impacts the community, how it impacts them, how it impacts their family, and a true understanding of what their ideas can do for the community and those people around them.”



“The Wilderness Protector” was one of dozens of innovations presented to judges from the local business community at last year’s Youth Innovation Fair. Applications are now being accepted for the 2026 Fair, which will take place this May. **Auroran file photo by Brock Weir**

Looking back over previous years, some of the projects Hamilton says stick out in her mind are those where students have focused on the wellbeing of themselves and others.

“I think when we look at today’s society and all the information around, whether it was something that would warm them up or something that would help them calm their nerves, I think we’re seeing a bit more of that from our youth where they’re looking at things that can bring them a bit more comfort where there’s a lot going on around social media, they’re online a lot, and they’re really looking at ways that they can help with their own mental health and wellbeing of those around them,” she says.

Adds Ware: “Some of the innovations I saw, there was a younger student who had coded and created from scratch this form of Frogger game, but the game was to settle stress levels. There were a couple of students that teamed up together on a weather thermometer-

type innovation to predict the weather better than the Weather Network. When Erin mentions their passion, that is what you saw all throughout the night last year. You saw that first, then you saw their invention.”

As students think ahead to the innovations they want to develop and bring to the fair, Ware suggests students lean in on their support systems to get it just right.

“You have the ideas, you have the capabilities, so once you come to your idea and develop it, practice it, challenge it, ask your friends, ask your family, because innovation is about evolving,” she says. “As the idea evolves and snowballs, that’s where it really comes to fruition. For some of the kids who perhaps might be shy to try something like this, just imagine what kind of adults, and what kind of community contributors they’re going to be down the road; for them to come up with the confidence to participate in this, this is going to be the start of

their innovation journey and they might as well start it off at a really fun, supportive event!”

Hamilton adds it’s important to be flexible. Your first idea might not be the final one you bring to the Fair, and it’s important to be open to evolving as you work through it.

“Test it out, practice your presentation – your first iteration of your idea or innovation may not work. Learn what’s working, what’s not working, and be able to speak to it and how you’ve changed from the time you started,” she says. “Don’t wait until the week before to put your product together. Try some different things because you’d be surprised at how your product or concept can evolve and become better over time by your willingness to try it, engage with other people, or do whatever you can.”

For more information on Aurora’s 2026 Youth Innovation Fair, including how to register, visit aurora.ca/YouthInnovation.



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Celtic with a Reggae twist!

Hobbs brings one of Sondheim's leading ladies to life in *A Little Night Music*

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

At an emotional crossroads, a renowned actress reflects on her life – a journey of love and loss – by singing the iconic song, *Send in the Clowns*.

It's one of the best-known pieces penned by the legendary Stephen Sondheim for Desiree Armfeldt, the leading lady of *A Little Night Music*. And that song was reason enough for Aurora's Kerry Hobbs to put her best foot forward in bringing Armfeldt to life in Wavestage Theatre's upcoming production of the musical.

"Stephen Sondheim is affectionally referred to as 'God' in the theatre world because his music has really rich, complex characters," says Hobbs. "It's a singer's dream to perform Sondheim's music. This is what Desiree sings when she is at her most emotionally vulnerable point and, as a performer, getting to tackle that material is truly a privilege."

Wavestage's production of *A Little Night Music* opens Thursday, March 26, at the NewRoads Performing Arts Centre in Newmarket, through Sunday, March 29.

"Step into the shimmering twilight of Stephen Sondheim's *A Little Night Music*, a waltzing whirlwind of romance, regret, and razor-sharp wit," says Wavestage. "Desiree Armfeldt, a renowned actress, is growing weary of her life on the road. A chance encounter with an old flame sets in motion a series of romantic misadventures that culminate in a madcap weekend in the country where passions erupt, jealousies flare, and hilarity triumphs over all."

"Part comedy of manners, part battle of the sexes, this funny, elegant work inspired by Ingmar Bergman's period film *Smiles of a Summer Night* explores a tangled web of affairs. Recipient of three Tony Awards, including Best Musical, *A Little Night Music* is a sumptuous, provocative, laugh-out-loud masterpiece that will leave you thoroughly enchanted."

It's a work that Hobbs was enchanted by even before she first auditioned for Wavestage.

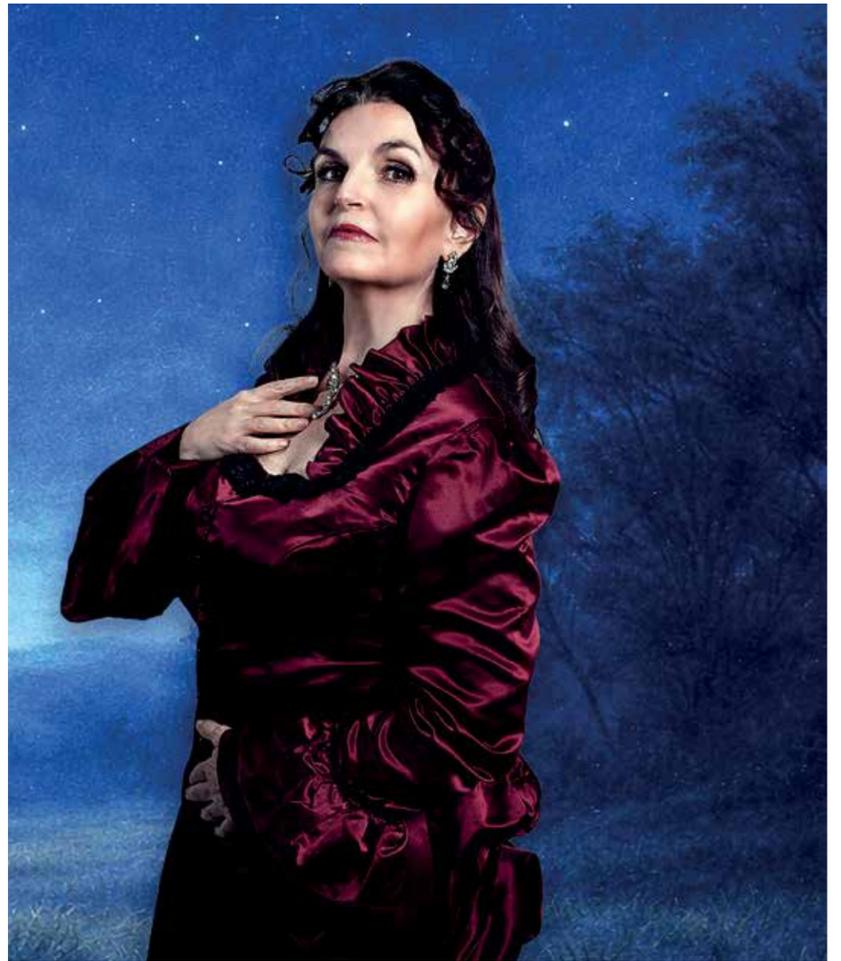
Active in community theatre since the late 1990s, this *A Little Night Music* is her first role with within the Wavestage community and Hobbs says the calibre of the production has been "fantastic."

"It's a fantastically talented cast," she says, particularly noting the actress who plays Desiree's daughter, Frederika, Harper Asch, is fresh off the recent Stratford Festival production of *Annie*. "There are some really and truly gifted performers who are part of the process and Wavestage attracts that calibre of performers."

"When I went to the read-through, I had really only met one person in the cast before, so I sat down at this table and people began delivering their lines with those really intense, intense characterizations, and then when they sang, I thought, 'Oh, this is going to be a magical experience,' because the voices are fantastic and the performances are really strong."

Hobbs' magical experience with community theatre is something she says she "stumbled into." As a child, she regularly attended church with her family and "grew up singing next to my mother." She began working on her voice in early adulthood where her coach suggested she try out community theatre. She was instantly bitten by the bug, she says.

"It's really, really rewarding to be a performer, but very few people can make it a career. There are limited opportunities for people to do this professionally and still be able to pay a mortgage and carry on with their family obligations. There are lots of incredibly talented people, many of whom was professional training, who've gone into community theater as a way to maintain that passion while still doing something that supports their lifestyle. It's really an infectious bug. Once people get into community theater there are so many positive experiences related to it."



Aurora's Kerry Hobbs is the leading lady for Wavestage's upcoming production of Stephen Sondheim's *A Little Night Music*.
Photo courtesy of Wavestage

It's a great community. It gives you the opportunity whether you're on stage or behind the stage, helping to be a part of a creative experience – there's really nothing quite like it."

As the cast and crew put the finishing touches on this month's performance, Hobbs says while *A Little Night Music* might not be Sondheim's best-known work, it offers a "truly delightful evening out, a great story, beautiful music, high calibre performance at a community price," and offers "we can all use a smile."

"It's a really good time to go to something that gives you that little bit of escape," she says. "We're in a time in the world where there's a lot of anxiety

and a lot of frustration and fear. What Sondheim has created with *A Little Night Music* is a complex world with complicated characters who have messy lives, but at the end of the day, it all turns out right. You go through that journey with the characters and it ends on a note of hope with joy, and it's funny. You'll have a good laugh as you sit through the show, you'll enjoy the story, the music is truly beautiful, and, at the end of the day, you walk out feeling good which, I think these days, perhaps more than other times is a really important consideration!"

For more, including ticket information, visit wavestagetheatre.com/nightmusic.

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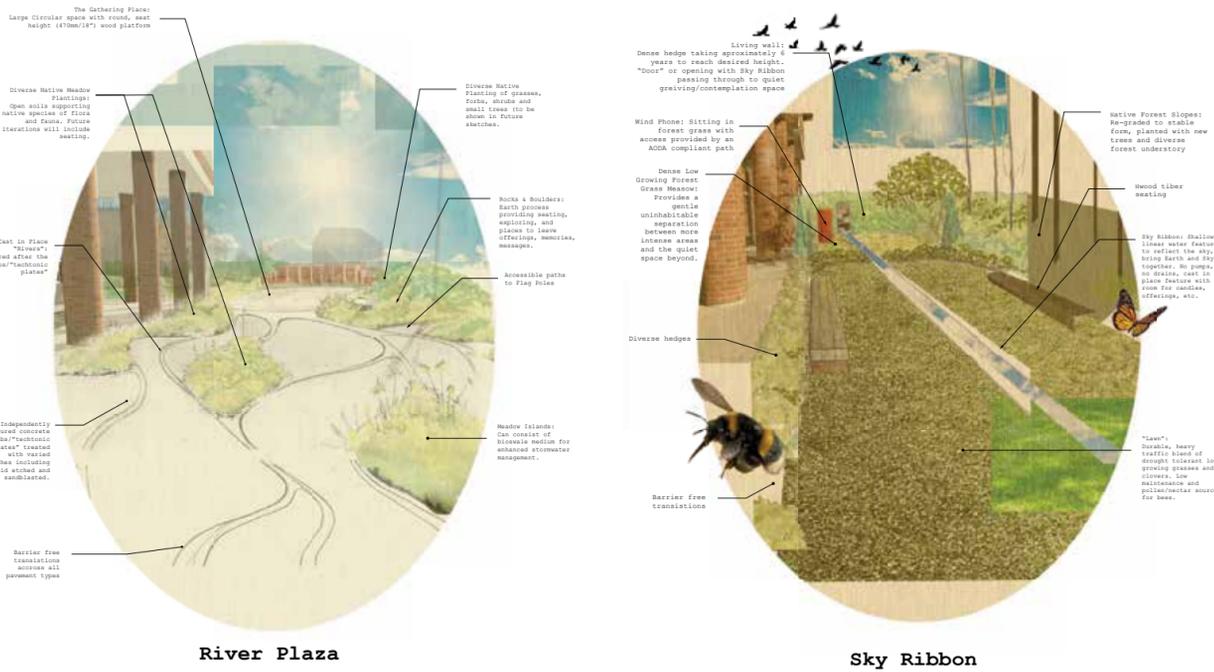
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Designs for Aurora's Community Reflection Space approved for Town Hall



area,” he said. “John West Way has a lot of traffic going up and down. The Seniors’ Centre across [the parking lot] is very busy almost all the time.”

Given the busyness of the area, Councillor Weese said he wanted a buffer from the noise and traffic so it would truly be a place for “reflection, quiet, and thoughtfulness – what it’s really designed for.”

“If you’re still in the design phase and you have some things that can start to make it a little more private, but not remote, you have my attention,” he told consultants.

Designs for the Community Reflection Space, seen above, were approved by Council at its most recent meeting.

Images courtesy of the Town of Aurora

BY BROCK WEIR
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LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Work on Aurora’s new Community Reflection Space is expected to begin in earnest this year after Council approved design concepts at its most recent meeting.

The Community Reflection Space was originally proposed by Aurora’s Indigenous Relations Committee as a place for Truth & Reconciliation, and the vision expanded to be a peaceful place where community members can gather in times of tragedy and mourning.

The Community Reflection Space will be constructed on the south front of Town Hall, overhauling the forecourt, which is now dominated

by an evergreen tree which was due to be removed for health reasons.

Work on the Community Reflection Space will be carried out in conjunction with a planned rehabilitation project on Town Hall’s south parking lot.

\$250,000 for the Community Gathering Space was allocated as part of the 2024 Municipal Budget.

While the space in question outside of Town Hall is relatively small, the design incorporates native vegetation, increases accessibility, and easy-to-maintain water features.

“It’s so small, but it’s so innovative, it’s beautiful, and I would say this is a very good use of taxpayers’ money,” said Ward 3 Councillor

Wendy Gaertner at last month’s General Committee meeting ahead of Council’s final approval on February 24, addressing the designers. “I appreciate the design; I appreciate the concept and the thought you had put in place for the space at Town Hall.”

Ward 2 Councillor Rachel Gilliland also praised the designs, although she had questions about the ongoing maintenance and longevity of what’s planned. Ward 1 Councillor Ron Weese added that while he was initially not a fan of the location proposed for the Community Reflection Space, he was “warming up to it.”

“The reason I wasn’t a fan of it is because it’s a very high-traffic

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Winterfresh event raises \$60,000 for York Region Food Network, Community

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

The community came together to take a serious bite out of food insecurity on Saturday, February 28, as the York Region Food Network hosted their signature fundraiser of the year, Winterfresh.

The annual trivia night, which was held at the Stonehaven Banquet Hall, was not just a fun way to raise much-needed funds for the York Region Food Network (YRFN) and its many programs, but it was also a celebration of the YRFN's 40th anniversary as community advocates and difference-makers when it comes to food insecurity.

"This year, our goal was \$60,000 and we hit that goal in a huge way," says YRFN's Joanne Witt.

As the night unfolded, hosted by quizmaster Javed Khan, attendees saw the "mercury" in the fundraising thermometer get ever-closer to the goal. After the fundraising "booze pull", silent and live auctions and more, they had raised an impressive \$57,000.

But that wasn't the end of the story. "When we announced we were at \$57,000, [past Aurora Citizen of the Year] Vern Cunningham raised his

hand and said, 'We're not leaving until we hit this goal. I'll donate \$500,'" Witt recalls, noting it started a wave of informal fundraising on the floor. "People just started reaching into their purses, wallets, waving cash in the air, some had credit cards to make donations so we didn't leave the night without hitting \$60,000. When we hit \$3,000, the room just exploded with people standing, cheering, arms in the air. It was such an amazing feeling of community coming together."

They certainly reached their \$60,000 goal and, since the event wrapped, donations have continued to roll in – and every dollar counts.

"Sixty-thousand is a huge amount and we can do so much with that money," says Witt. "We are so frugal with every dollar because we know every dollar that we spend means a dollar worth of food that we weren't able to pass on to somebody who needs it. We're so cautious about every penny that we spend. That \$60,000 is going to go so far not just in being able to continue on with the food programs that we have, but [help] our Good Food Box."

The YRFN's funding for the Good Food Box ran out last year, she explains, and since then they



Winterfresh's winning trivia team poses with their prizes.

Contributed photo

have been exploring other ways to get similar products to the hands of individuals and families who need them in different ways.

The money raised at Winterfresh will go a long way in making this a reality, she says, and will also support their Affordable Fresh Food Markets, which they host monthly in various locations throughout York Region, including at the Salvation Army and Welcoming Arms here in Aurora.

"We're always looking at other programs and services we want to introduce. One thing I love about this organization is the fact that we're very responsive to what people tell us we need, and that's where the programs come from. We don't just make programs up and then try to put them out there hoping it's what people need," she says. "We are constantly talking to people we're supporting [asking], can we improve this service for you? Is this what you need? Is this what you're looking for? That's how some of these things like the Affordable Fresh Food Market actually came out of our participants in the Good Food Box program. People could order [the boxes] when they came to Aurora to pick them up, but we started to get feedback from people in, say, Georgina or Markham who didn't know whether

it was really worth it anymore with the cost of gas and everything else to drive up here to pick up the Good Food Box and go back home. The Good Food Boxes would be based on seasonal fruits and vegetables and what donations were coming into us, so people didn't get to pick what was in the Good Food Box. Sometimes we wouldn't even know, so people would be ordering the Good Food Box and not necessarily knowing what's in it unless they were following what's in season.

"The Affordable Fresh Food Markets came out of that in two ways: being able to give people an opportunity to shop for the items that they want – this way they can come and 'shop' for the things that they need in their own neighbourhood. We created that program to have the Markets available for people right in their own communities and giving them an option to choose what they want as opposed to the Good Food Box. Some people still love the mystery of the Good Food Box and other people prefer the Affordable Fresh Food Market, but the great thing is we're constantly talking to and listening to the people that we support to see what they need, and then we look at program and service creation based on that."

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Region raises alarm bells over opioid use, declining mental health

From page 1

psychological distress. Those reporting that have actually increased from 42.9 per cent in 2017 to over 55 per cent in 2023, again consistent with Provincial trends.

“A somewhat alarming trend, I would say, although we are seeing a decline in this now, is the non-medical use of prescription opioid pain relievers by high school students in York Region has pretty much doubled, from 8.6 per cent in 2021 to 16.5 per cent in 2025.”

Other areas of concern identified through the study, she said, include a near-doubling of those reporting food insecurity issues between 2019 and 2024, and the rise of vaccine-preventable diseases, such as measles.

“We do have rising rates of philosophical vaccine exemptions in our population,” said Dr. Karachiwalla. “It has almost doubled since pre-pandemic. It’s still quite low compared to the rest of Ontario, which is good news, but we’re seeing an increase from 1 per cent to 2 per cent. Climate change is worsening, so we are seeing higher rates of emergency department (ED) visits due to things like heat-related illness, particularly in seniors as a result of extreme weather.”

“We are working on climate change, looking at that resiliency piece to health-related events. We are also working on the issue of opioids and substance use. We have a large community initiative with different community partners, people with lived experience at the table, that are informing us on how we can work with the school boards, for example, to not only address stigma, but really work on the prevention aspect and stopping people from using before they start.”

While this work is being done at the Region, elected representatives suggested more hands need to be on deck to address some of these concerns. Asked by Regional Councillor Michael Chan on how these stats fit into an overall picture of whether York Region is in a better or worse position now than in five years ago, Dr. Karachiwalla said while there has been a “gradual decline” in mental health Region-wide, some of the trends related to youth substance use are going in the right direction.

“If you look at youth and the trends of substance use over time, we are seeing a bit of a decline, which is very promising,” she said, noting declining rates in cigarette smoking and vaping. “Even cannabis use is starting to come down, alcohol as well. We are seeing a bit of a change for the better in those areas.”

“Otherwise, if you look sort of big picture when you compare us to the rest of Ontario, our rates of many of our illnesses tend to be a little bit lower in York Region, which is very promising, so we’re either close to the Ontario trend or superseding that, which is good in many of our indicators, but it is a bit of a complex picture. We’re doing decently in the area of the substance use and a few of the chronic disease rates tracking to Ontario, but mental health for sure, like it is elsewhere, is on the decline.”

Although substance use is on the

decline, the rates related to youth remained a primary focus for Regional Council, with Chan pressing for reasons on why both the rates for opiate use and food insecurity have doubled over the study period.

“I think it’s a complex mix of factors,” said Dr. Karachiwalla. “If you look at opioid use in youth, and we’re talking about use of prescription opioids for recreational reasons, we are seeing a little bit of a decline since I reported it to you, but it has been a jump if you compare it to, say, 2019. I think there are a number of different factors. I do think it correlates pretty closely with mental health, social isolation, loneliness, screen time. We are seeing all those things as an issue among our elementary and high school populations. I think that is definitely one of the factors is just declining mental health, looking for sort of ways to cope.”

“Food insecurity, that we have seen a doubling over five years related to a number of different things like cost of living, cost of food prices are through the roof, and we don’t just mean not having enough food when we talk about food security – it’s also access to quality, nutritious food. We have seen fast food outlets really increase as well in density. That tends to be a cheaper way of obtaining food and feeling full with ongoing income insecurity and disparities. That probably explains a lot of the reasons we’re seeing food insecurity as a big issue.”

Newmarket Mayor John Taylor said of the statistics of one in every two students “having a serious psychological distress in high school and opioid use increasing to 20 per cent for non-medical reasons,” if people “aren’t shocked and concerned to extreme levels then apathy is running wild.”

“I think the public health sector has been worried about this and raising alarm bells for a very long time because these are shocking statistics,” replied Dr. Karachiwalla. “Opioid use alone, we see the harms associated with that – very poor mental health, particularly accelerating through the pandemic. We have a very close relationship with our school board partners [and] for years we’ve had a school standard where we work with them to think about prevention, bring mental health to light, normalize talking about mental health, reducing the stigma. We are working very closely with our school board partners on supporting their peer-based or student-led initiatives to talk about mental health and decrease that stigma. In York Region, because of the diversity we have, we also have a really strong sense of community and cultural norms, that stigma might be different in different populations as well. We have tried to take a more culturally-sensitive approach when dealing with that.”

“Here in York Region, we have the Community Opioid Drug Response Collaborative, which is a set of community partners, people with lived experiences. We’re talking about doing some surveillance, early warning when we see a spike in cases and really looking at that prevention aspect. I think one of the most important initiatives we do is, as much as we can, start earlier in life. We know

that when we work on reducing adverse childhood experiences...that really changes somebody’s trajectory in how resilient they are, how much they might suffer from mental health or addictions. We’re trying to work across sectors to begin at the early years and look at how we can reduce child abuse, neglect, poverty, all

those things that affect you in your early years.”

Social isolation, she added, was a big factor when it comes to poor mental health and the Region is looking at a number of ways to combat that from reducing barriers to exercise, including the promotion of complete and age-friendly communities.



HOLI CELEBRATIONS – Adityn and Sarah are pictured getting crafty last week at a Holi celebration hosted by the Aurora Public Library. The colourful celebration is set to return to Aurora Town Square this Sunday, March 15, with a morning of Bollywood dancing followed by colour-throwing outdoors. For more, see Things You Ought to Know on Page 27.

Auroran photo by Glenn Rodger



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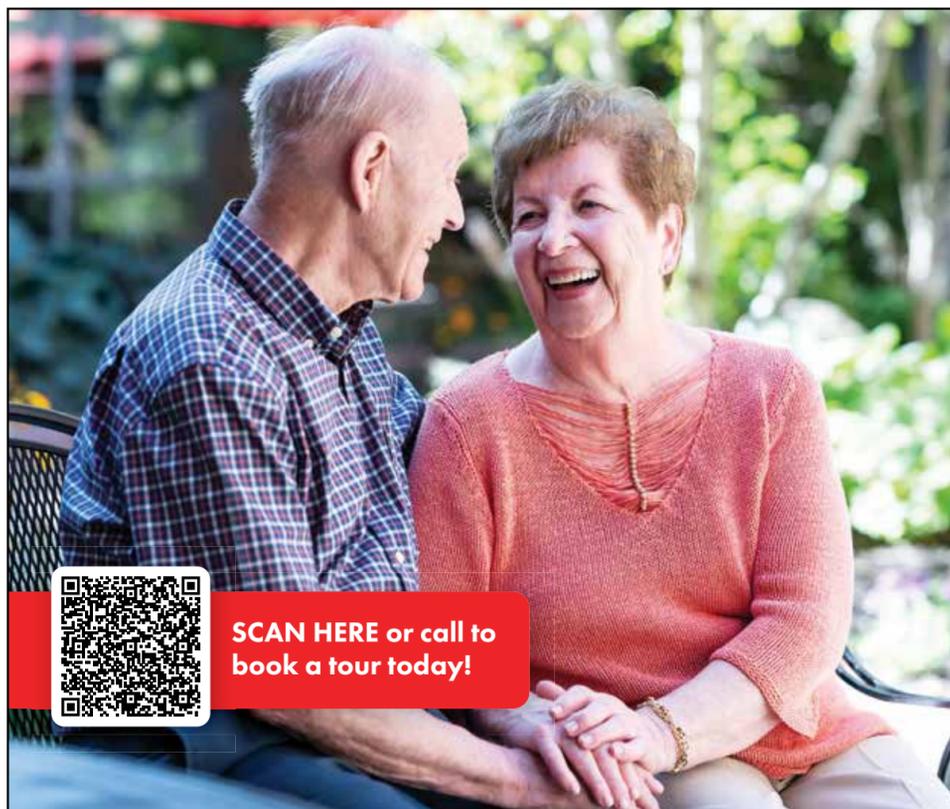
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Haunted Forest, Christmas Market among Top 100 Festivals in Ontario

BY BROCK WEIR
 EDITOR
 LOCAL JOURNALISM
 INITIATIVE REPORTER

Christmas came a little late – or Halloween came in a little early – for the Town of Aurora recently as its annual Haunted Forest and Christmas Market events placed among Festival & Events Ontario’s Top 100.

Festival and Events Ontario’s (FEO) Top 100 Awards recognizes the best festivals and events that take place each year Province-wide.

Each event was judged on innovation, uniqueness, economic impact, and community leadership.

“We are proud that two of our events have been named among FEO’s Top 100 Festivals & Events for 2026,” said Mayor Tom Mrakas in a statement. “This honour reflects the commitment, creativity, and hard work that our Town staff, community partners, and dedicated volunteers put into bringing these events to life. We are grateful to FEO for this recognition and to our community for its ongoing support.”

Organizers behind the events, also thanked community partners and dedicated volunteers, with Shelley Ware, Special Events Coordinator for the Town of Aurora, telling The Auroran having a “supportive Mayor and Council” is also an essential ingredient in their success.

“We do produce 23 events a year; but we are working on 23 events a year all year-round for idea generation, innovation, networking with our colleagues, looking across the Province, and I even do a lot of webinars in other countries, and it’s pulling all that together; keeping our synergies and energies high,” says Ware. “We have such strong commitments from the volunteers, from such solid, solid community organizations – Aurora is the perfect community with the right amount of heart, the right amount of support to be able to pull these experiences together; in addition to a very, very supportive Mayor and Town Council.

“The support we get enables us to really, really strive to do the best we can possibly

do. We’ve got Council support, we’ve got volunteer support, community partner support, and it truly is a privilege.”

When asked what made the Haunted Forest, which marked its 20th anniversary in 2025, and the Christmas Market stand out from the crowd, Ware says it’s the commitment to always have at least one new element in the program to keep residents engaged.

“I think it’s the freshness,” she says. “There’s always a guarantee of a new element that things will change, and I also think whenever visitors come to Aurora they’re getting a warm welcome, whether they’re filling their car with gas, before they even get to the event, but once they get to the event, we strive for it to be an overall great experience.

“Both the Haunted Forest and the Christmas Market are extremely complex events and have many different layers. There are layers the community doesn’t see, such as the intricacies of the emergency management plans that are in place, in addition to the complex marketing of the events, to the different types of programming that targets a variety of generations. In addition to that, we really focus hard on making events more accessible each go-round, so I think what makes them solid events is the community doesn’t see that complexity. Hopefully they just see the smoothness.”

While this year’s recognition from FEO is a testament to everyone involved in making them a success, Ware notes it’s also a “reflection of how unified our community is and how truly special it is.”

“I’m a firm believer that the events a municipality produces is creating the story of that community, so having our stories created in this way is really a huge bonus, and they can’t happen if not for the community showing up time and time again, the endless volunteers always coming enthusiastic, and our community partners. They say it takes a village to raise a child, but I don’t even know what the appropriate metaphor is for what pulls an event together, but we’re truly privileged to be able to do this in Aurora.”



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Celebrating Lunar New Year at Aurora Public Library



The Fang Hua Singing and Dance Troupe took over the Aurora Public Library's living room space for a full program of music, dancing and cultural displays to mark the start of Lunar New Year. The event kept attendees spellbound, including Mayor Tom Mrakas who stopped by and was asked to participate in the fun. Auroran photos by Glenn Rodger



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WEEK OF MARCH 12, 2026

Van Berkel's four-point performance propels Panthers to 8-1 pummeling of Oakville Hornets

BY JIM STEWART

The Central York U22 Panthers' offence woke up from a late-winter nap in Oakville on Thursday night.

Led by Demi "Laser" Lazarou's two second-period goals and Annabella "Big Goal" Van Berkel's four-point performance, the Junior Panthers hammered the Hornets 8-1 to start their two-game, regular-season-ending road trip with a bang.

The eight-goal outburst at Joshua Creek Arena was in stark contrast to the Junior club's recent dearth of lamp-lighting. The Panthers were shut out twice and held to two goals or less four times in the last five weeks. With the OWHL playoffs a week away — to paraphrase the title of a great Nicholson/Keaton rom-com — "Something Had to Give."

It — the offensive slump — began to give forty-three seconds into Thursday night's game when Anastasia Trifon staked the visitors to a 1-0 lead and earned an assist for Van Berkel.

The Panthers piled on in the middle frame with three goals in the opening three minutes of play.

Lazarou started "The Panther Prowl" when she scored her 17th of the season, 37 seconds into the second period. Providence College Friars NCAA D1 commit Elizabeth Janovski made it 3-0 at 18:21.

Van Berkel's power play goal padded the Panthers' lead to four at 17:25.

Charlie Worrone narrowed Oakville's deficit to 4-1 twenty-two seconds after Van Berkel's 38th of the season. However, University of Toronto Varsity Blues OUA commit

Abby Pak restored Central York's four-goal lead by finishing a passing play with Audrey Martone and Van Berkel.

Lazarou beat Oakville goaltender Chloe Smith for a second time in the period to make it 6-1 heading into the second intermission. The gifted goal scorer's 18th of the season demonstrated her ongoing recovery from a serious shoulder injury that forced her to miss eleven mid-season games.

Productive blueliners Mackenzie Cotey and Briar Deckers scored third-period goals to provide the margin of victory and augment Central York's offence with two points each versus the Hornets.

The eight goals in Oakville represented the Panthers' biggest offensive outburst since a two-week period in the Fall when they pummeled three opponents in rapid succession: Windsor Southwest Wildcats 13-1 on September 28; Brampton Canadettes 10-1 on October 14; and Ridley Tigers 10-3 on October 18 in a game that Central York trailed 3-0 and then scored ten unanswered goals.

Panthers Head Coach Steve Dempsey was pleased with his team's performance in Oakville: "We asked them to simplify their game so they'd move the puck quicker and make plays faster after dragging a bit against Stoney Creek. We wanted them to be more predictable for one another. We did a good job."

It was a different outcome on Saturday evening in the Panthers' disappointing 3-2 shootout loss to the 11th-place Wolves in Whitby.

The Junior Panthers let a 2-0 third-period lead slip away when the home

side tallied a pair of goals four minutes apart to deny Central York the win in regulation.

Coach Dempsey outlined the key factors that cost the Panthers a regular-season-ending victory: "I don't feel as though we played as fast as we could have. We lost earlier in the year 2-1 to Whitby because they disrupted our flow. Our game was a little disjointed on Saturday, too. We wanted to build off the Oakville win. Whitby's a dump-and-chase team, and we settled into their game. At the end, we lost in a five-round shootout, and some of our better shooters lost control of the puck during the shootout."

Four periods before the ill-fated shootout, the Panthers opened a 1-0 lead on Janovski's 9th of the season after only eight minutes had ticked off the clock.

Van Berkel's power play goal with 1:41 left in the second period gave the visitors a two-goal lead heading into the second intermission.

Central York appeared on their way to a regulation win to close the regular season, but the home side rallied in the final period.

The Wolves got on the board at 11:34 of the final frame when Madison Siatsis beat Panthers' goaltender Claire Hicks— who gave up her first goal in five-plus periods after shutting out the Toronto Aeros 4-0 last Sunday and the Wolves for 49 minutes on Thursday.

With 7:08 left in regulation, Kali Maechtel's goal pulled the Wolves into a 2-2 tie and forced overtime.

The extra period settled nothing, and the Wolves eked out the victory in a five-round shootout.

The Panthers' regulation defeat of the Hornets and their shootout loss to the Wolves relegated Central York to the



Annabella Van Berkel tallied five points, including her 39th goal, on the Junior Panthers' regular-season-closing road trip through Oakville and Whitby. Van Berkel finished 12th in scoring in the OWHL's 22U Elite Division.

Auroran photo by Jim Stewart

seventh seed heading into the OWHL playoffs. It also set up a rematch of last year's opening round playoff series with the tenth-place Kingston Ice Wolves.

Coach Dempsey's crew will look to avenge the Ice Wolves' playoff series upset of the Junior Panthers last Spring. Central York will host Kingston for a pair of games to kick off the series this weekend at SARC. Puck drop on Saturday, March 14, is 3:55 p.m., and on Sunday, March 15, it is 3:25 p.m.

James Thomson named Tigers' Head Coach & GM for 2026-27

BY JIM STEWART

James Thomson lost his interim Head Coach label on Monday afternoon as the Aurora Tigers announced that their current General Manager will add Head Coach to his job description for the 2026-27 season.

Thomson's inspirational leadership behind the bench — partnered with the steady presence of longtime Aurora Assistant Coach Dave Goverde — propelled the young Tigers to play their best hockey of the 2025-26 season.

Under the newly-installed systems of Thomson and Goverde, the Tigers clawed their way to a respectable 5-3-0-0 record and a .625 winning percentage

— far above the .333 PCT and 15-31-0-2 record the team cobbled together in its first 48 games.

The Tigers opened the Thomson-Goverde Era with a 3-0 win in Cobourg on February 9. Although Aurora was shut out 4-0 by Pickering four days later, the rejuvenated squad skated to back-to-back wins over Niagara Falls (6-3) and Markham (4-3) on February 14 and 15.

Even more impressive was one of the Tigers' losses — a narrow 2-1 defeat at the hands of powerhouse Stouffville. Thomson's young charges created much suspense in their tilt with the Spirit and almost ruined the celebration of Senior Player Recognition Night at the

Continued on page 22

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Pickering College Pumas cap undefeated season with decisive win over Greenwood 61-38 in CISAA Junior Boys' championship

BY JIM STEWART

Pickering College basketball coaches Alex Grenier and Cameron Campbell surveyed the home court celebration unfolding at Egan House on Wednesday afternoon and liked what they saw.

After guiding the Pumas to the CISAA Junior Boys' Championship, Coach Grenier expressed his satisfaction regarding his team's emphatic back-to-back wins. A 61-38 victory over Greenwood in the final, preceded by a 70-49 decision over Albert College in the semifinal, showed the young squad's cohesive quality.

"They worked as a team and ran plays well. I thought we had good energy on defense and they worked together. They've played hard all season, and it was nice to see them execute all the way to the end. It feels good."

Coach Campbell celebrated the team culture that was created to cobble together a 10-0 record.

"The boys were holding each other accountable. It was a key to our season. We have second-year players who were leaders."

Coach Grenier echoed his coaching partner's insights: "They even started setting up our drills before the coaches arrived at practice."

Grenier and Campbell, both in their third year of coaching basketball together at Pickering College, singled out two players who were keys to their back-to-back wins on Wednesday.

The play of Pumas point guard Aly Jindani and centre William Gojic was highlighted by Coach Campbell: "Aly is a Grade 8 who played up with us this season. He wanted more of a challenge. He played such a big part of today's wins. Will had another big double-double for us. He might have had 30 rebounds in the final. He anchors everything on D and on our offense, too."

The athletic and articulate Gojic noted the key to their emphatic win over Albert

College during a brief break between the Pumas' semifinal and championship games.

"It's been all about moving on offense. When we worked as a team, it was easy. We felt really good going into the game after finishing the regular season 8-0. The start of the game was so important for us. We set the tone early and we kept pressure on them at midcourt."

Indeed, Gojic and Jindani spurred that quick start versus Albert College. The Pumas' dynamic duo asserted their intense midcourt pressure leading to three turnovers and a backcourt violation in the first 1:40 of play.

Jindani ran wild in the opening quarter with 11 points to set the tone discussed by Gojic. After building a 10-0 lead on Jindani's steal and a layup, Eugene Zhou's three-ball, Gojic's steal and layup, and Jindani's old-fashioned three-point play, the relentless offensive attack by the blue-clad Pumas withered the visitors.

Gojic poured it on with a pair of mid-range jumpers and Jindani continued to slash to the hoop for two more dynamic layups to build a 24-5 lead after the first quarter.

Coaches Grenier and Campbell substituted freely in the second quarter with the prospect of back-to-back games on Wednesday afternoon.

Zhou steadied the subs in the second quarter by slicing to the basket and hitting another big three to make it 40-16, much to the delight of the packed gymnasium which featured a demonstrative Pumas mascot. Excellent free throw shooting by the on-court Pumas and some aggressive D extended the lead to 47-22 at half time.

The visitors regrouped at intermission and the third quarter belonged to a reanimated squad from Belleville. Shooting guard Grant Williams hit his fourth three-ball of the game and the Kelly Green-clad Panthers cut their deficit to 53-43 one minute into the final frame.

The Pumas' starters were reinserted



Photo by Zoe Hipel

and the squad's 3-2 midcourt trap press generated turnovers to stifle the Panthers' offense. Gojic exerted his will in the paint with drives to the hoop and strong offensive rebounding to spur a critical 7-0 run that ballooned into a 66-43 lead with 2:51 to play.

The speedy and steady play of Zhou and Jindani netted the guards 19 points each to lead all scorers in the semifinal.

The Junior Pumas' recipe for success in the semifinal was not replicated versus Greenwood in the championship final. A comparatively-sluggish first quarter yielded the home side a narrow 12-8 lead after eight minutes of play. Zhou and Gojic paced the Pumas with five points each in the opening quarter with Ethan Gao hitting two crucial free throws.

With "Let's Go Pumas" echoing through Egan House, the Pickering squad's offence woke up when Gojic's layup made it 18-12 and Jindani's successful "and-one" extended the home side's lead to 21-12. The nine-point margin was maintained by the Pumas in a 25-16 half-time lead.

Greenwood opened the third quarter on a 7-2 run to narrow the home side's lead to

27-23. Quite suddenly, the Conference of Independent Schools Athletic Association championship final had something the semifinal had lacked: suspense.

However, the Pumas demonstrated their balanced scoring when Gojic, Jindani, Aaron Prasad, and Zhou delivered big baskets on their ensuing 9-2 run. Gojic's left-handed layup with 15.6 seconds left in the third quarter executed a timeout play to create a 39-27 lead.

Jindani opened the fourth quarter with a flourish, scoring his team's first six points on daring layups.

Zhou's drive and old-fashioned three-point play helped push the Pumas' lead to 52-35 with three minutes to play. Gojic pulled down nine rebounds in the quarter to limit the Panthers' second-chance scoring opportunities.

When Prasad's jumper hit the mark at 2:02 and Ethan Gao turned a steal into a layup to make it 59-35 at 1:26, the Pumas' starting lineup was extracted from the game and the undefeated team added another year to the Pickering College championship basketball banner.

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Ryan Nembhard inks 2-year deal with Mavericks



General Manager and Assistant Coach James Thomson, pictured here third from the right in a suit and tie at the Tigers' Season-Opening Faceoff Ceremony in September, was named Head Coach of Aurora's Junior A hockey team on March 2.

From page 20
Stouffville Arena on February 19.

In the final week of the season, the Tigers swept a home-and-home series from the playoff-bound St. Michael's Buzzers — 3-0 and 4-3 — due in part to the stellar goaltending of Kian Hodgins, who made 86 saves in the two contests played on February 20 and 28. Although the Tigers were drubbed 8-1 by the first-place Golden Hawks in Trenton on February 27, that kind of one-sided result was the exception for Thomson's team and not the rule over the final three weeks of the season. Contextually, the Golden Hawks eviscerated most of their opponents in February — notably, the beatdowns of Markham (8-1), Caledon (9-2), and North York (11-0) in three consecutive games from February 10-15.

The tenth-place Tigers finished the season 20-34-0-2 and missed the OJHL East playoffs for the third year in a row. The Lindsay Muskies clinched the eighth and final playoff spot in the OJHL East on the final week of the season with a 22-27-5-2 record and 52 points, nine more than the Tigers.

The installation of James Thomson as Head Coach and General Manager on March 2 would seem to be a step forward for the Tigers franchise, which won the Canadian Junior A championship in 2004 and 2007. The dynamic duo of Thomson and Goverde could return the proud old franchise to its Glory Days. First step: climb at least two spots in the standings in 2026-27 and make the playoffs on the 20th anniversary of Aurora's last national Junior A hockey championship.

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Fifth annual INSPIRE day a success for Aurora, Newmarket, CYFS



The Central York Fire Services' fifth annual INSPIRE event, which is held each year to commemorate International Women's Day, was another success for the local fire department as hundreds descended on the Ian Laing Headquarters on Earl Stewart Drive for a day designed to "inspire future generations to consider a career" in emergency response "and celebrate the role that first responders play in keeping the community safe." Among the participants at this year's event were the York Regional Police, York Paramedic Services, Ontario Provincial Police, the Seneca Polytechnic Firefighting Program, and a wide range of community groups, including Girls Inc., and York Pride. (Top) Nancy and Julia meet with firefighters. (Second) John, Francis, and Ethan were there to answer questions. (Third) Shazia, Adeebah, and Kylie showcased health programs at the local and Regional levels. (Fourth) Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill MP Costas Menegakis met with bylaw officers from Aurora and Newmarket. (Fifth) Newmarket-Aurora MP Sandra Cobena was joined by her husband, Matthijs, at the event. (Sixth) Phiona of Coconut Village Elevate chats with Seneca's Eric. **Auroran photos by Brock Weir**

Aurora eyes drop-in programs for roller skating enthusiasts

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

The popularity of roller skating has seen a resurgence in recent years and the Town of Aurora could soon offer drop-in sessions as part of its menu of recreation programs.

Aurora has been looking at ways to offer roller skating opportunities following a motion last fall which tasked staff with coming back with a list of options for the 2026 season.

"Roller skating is a popular recreational and athletic activity that combines physical exercise with entertainment," said Lisa Warth, Aurora's Manager of Recreation, in a report set to come before Council at the Committee level this week.

"Roller skating is experiencing a revival throughout Ontario, as it is relatively easy to learn and can be enjoyed by people of all ages. Roller skating venues are popping up around the Greater Toronto Area and include rinks, parks, and urban spaces."

While a permanent venue isn't among the recommendations that will be up for consideration at the Committee of the Whole meeting, Warth notes staff were only able to find one roller skating program provider. A single one-day five-hour event with this company, however, could cost \$4,950 – funds that are not currently within the Community Services Department's budget.

"The program would have to run as a 'pay to play' model similar to many other programs," says Warth. "In order to generate revenue to cover the fee charged by SUSO, the charge per person per one hour skate would range from \$26.40 - \$29.70. This assumes a maximum of 30 skaters per hour. This does

not take into account additional costs the Town would incur such as staff, music, set up and clean up, etc. Staff are not confident that the fees that need to be charged would resonate with the community. A family of four would have to pay over \$100 for one hour of roller skating and many families may find this prohibitive, thus affecting attendance. Some communities have been able to offer the SUSO service at no charge or a lower fee and offset the cost with sponsorships or grants. This is something staff could pursue; however, the Town is always seeking sponsorships and grants for other initiatives."

Instead, staff are recommending drop-in programs as a more "economical" model moving forward.

"Roller skating could be offered as a drop-in activity very similar to the Town's other drop-in activities, such as leisure ice skating," says Warth. "However, equipment would not be available for use and participants would have to bring their own roller skates or inline skates and protective equipment. This activity could be done indoors or on one of the arena floors while ice is out or outdoors if a suitable, safe venue could be found."

"Staff would be on site to ensure safety, provide crowd control, music, and set up and clean up. A roller skating drop-in admission fee would be similar to existing fees, which range from \$3.09 - \$4.38 per person, per drop-in time. The model is low risk for the Town, but limits participation to those who have skates and protective equipment to use, similar to ice skating, shinney, and other drop-ins where participants need to bring their own equipment."

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Stan Douglas (b. 1960), *Masonic Lodge, Barkerville* (detail), 2006, laserchrome print, 127 x 145 cm, courtesy of the artist, Victoria Miro, and David Zwirner © Stan Douglas

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Joly encourages public participation at International Women's Day talk



Leah Taylor Roy, former MP for Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill, held a fireside chat with Melanie Joly on Friday night at Aurora Town Square to mark International Women's Day.

Auroran photo by Glenn Rodger

From page 1

a very different voice.

"I couldn't show the same type of leadership. I had to create my own path," said Joly, and this is a factor many women face when considering stepping up to be the change they want to see in the world.

Joly may have come in a "close second" in Montreal's 2013 mayoral race, but hit her stride at the Federal level when she was elected as Member of Parliament two years later and has spent the last decade serving Canada in multiple cabinet posts, including the high-profile positions of Minister of Foreign Affairs, International Development, and, currently Minister of Industry.

Joly made her first visit to Aurora on Friday evening when she joined Leah Taylor Roy, former Member of Parliament for Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill, at Aurora Town Square for a fireside chat to mark International Women's Day.

Organized by the riding's Liberal Women's Club, the event filled Aurora Town Square's Performance Hall where the two women shared the challenges and rewards of becoming involved in politics.

"In the context of International Women's Day, we need to reflect on all those who were very strong woman trailblazers and everything that has been achieved in our country and around the world," said Joly. "At the same time, we need to think of what is happening now and what's ahead, what is the place of women now, and how can we convince our girls and the next generation that their place is also at the table?"

"We cannot let down our guard. We need to continue to fight back. We need to stand strong. We cannot take anything for granted."

We live in a "much more dangerous and complicated world," she

continued, and while there are many factors beyond our control, Canadians can control what is happening within our own borders.

"We can control how we build a very strong economy and we can control how we keep our society a just society. That is supported, of course, by very strong jobs, job creation, and fighting back against these unjustified and illegal tariffs that have been plaguing so many workers. This context of talking about control comes the idea of choosing. We can choose how much we're supporting our workers, we can choose how much we're building a strong economy, but we can also choose what we do to support women and women's rights and how we bring women to the table."

One reason Canada remains able to attract investments within the country, she contended, is because Canada "has the most educated workforce in the world and that, of course, includes a lot of women."

"We're a society that believes that when you come in and you invest and you look at investors, or diplomats, or foreign officials, we look at them in the eyes, we shake hands, and they'll know we will follow the contract," she continued. "I'm giving you this because I would not have said that to all of you in 2015 when I was first elected because these were things we were taking for granted. But, in this world now, this is not the case.... We cannot take for granted women's rights."

"My goal is to give you the energy, the spirit, the trust that we can control what is happening in our society because we have power over all of us, individually and collectively. We can do this together, we can get involved, we can trust one another, we can fight for democracy, and we can make sure that we fight for a better society, a just society, which basically is taking care

of the vulnerable, but also being able to create growth that will benefit all of us."

These sentiments were shared by Leah Taylor Roy, who stated she intends to seek re-election.

Touching upon the theme of evening - "Rights, Justice, Action for All Women and Girls" - and the broader International Women's Day 2026 theme of "Give to Gain", she said, "I think we all know that when we give, we benefit."

"We benefit ourselves, we benefit all society, and I know that all the people here in this room give a lot, so thank you for that," said Taylor Roy. "When I think about this in the context of what is happening in the world today, I believe these themes reach beyond women. We have challenges, we all know that, but we're uniting together

to face those challenges.

"Canada is strong and proud. Every person here in this room is part of the solution to what faces us. Regardless of gender identity, we're all Canadians and although this evening our focus is on women, and we as women are a critical part of the solution, we need the talents and strengths of all Canadians to protect our country and build a strong future. We cannot afford to keep any talent in this country underutilized because of barriers faced, which means those barriers that have been made must be dismantled. While the main focus of our government is to build Canada strong, and the focus is on the economy, safety, and the cost of living, the issues of equality for women in all peoples must not backslide. We cannot move forward and face the challenges ahead if we go backwards."



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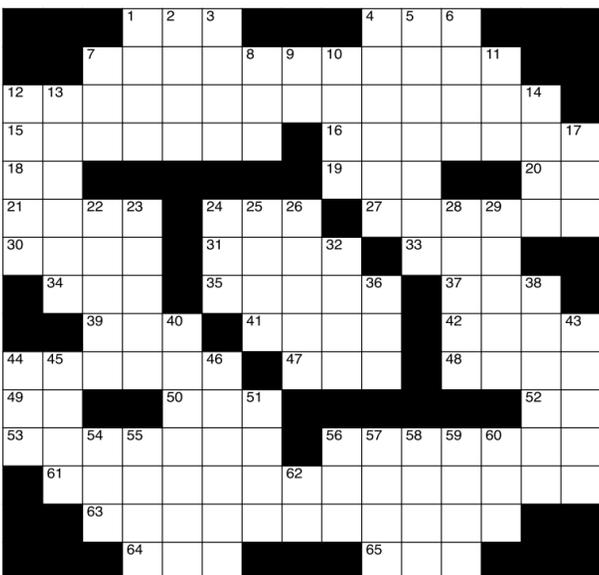


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- Popular historical novel
- In a law-abiding way
- A place to sleep
- Criticize

CLUES DOWN

- Impression in a surface
- Computer language
- Relating to the car
- Occupant
- Member of Great Plains people
- Social media firm
- Digital audiotape
- Midway between east and southeast
- Chronic, progressive disease
- Chinese lute
- Not wet
- Moves wings up and down
- Communication devices
- Swiss river
- Female sibling
- Receive
- Relating to a type
- General's assistant (abbr.)
- Sleep bank
- Taxi driver
- Moves into without difficulty
- Bicycle manufacturer
- Traditional rhythmic pattern
- Fugitives are on it
- Bitter-tasting organic substance
- Die
- Matched
- Literary genre _-fi
- Cannot
- Pounded
- British rock group
- Debt relief order
- 2006 NL Cy Young winner
- Green vegetable
- Tough outer skin of fruit
- Spumante (Italian wine)
- Ailments
- Famed singer Charles
- Camper



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