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# THE AUROREDAN

Aurora's Community Newspaper

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[TheAuroran.com](http://TheAuroran.com)

FREE

WEEK OF MAY 21 2026



**MARKET MORNINGS** – The Aurora Farmers' Market was bustling at Town Park on Saturday morning, and among the local residents enjoying the day – and a bite to eat – at the weekend staple were Oleg, Irit, Mirion, Emma and Fim. This Saturday, the Market will return to Town Park from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. as they host their annual Spring Festival on May 23.  
**Auroran photo by Glenn Rodger**

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## Council, public divided on future use of Victoria Hall

### Potential lease agreement still under wraps

BY BROCK WEIR  
EDITOR  
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

The future of Victoria Hall could go commercial after Council considered the next chapter for the downtown Aurora landmark last week.

Council voted in favour of a decision coming out of a Closed Session meeting on May 12 where the topic of discussion was a lease agreement.

Approval came on a vote of 4 – 3, with Mayor Tom Mrakas and Councillors Rachel Gilliland, Michael Thompson, and Harold Kim voting for it to move forward, while Councillors Ron Weese, Wendy Gaertner, and John Gallo voted against.

Although Council members were limited in what they could say on the lease on the building, located on the southwest corner of Mosley and Victoria Streets, as it was discussed in camera, members who opposed the agreement said they believed it was not in the community's best interest.

"I'm not in favour of proceeding with what's being recommended," said

Continued on page 8

### Local youth wow with solutions for future at Youth Innovation Fair

BY BROCK WEIR  
EDITOR  
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

As someone who lives with a physical disability, John Perry is attuned to the needs of those on similar paths.

Perry, who lives with cerebral palsy, has seen his friends excluded from certain groups and activities because of their ability to speak. But rather than just sit on the sidelines, the Grade 11 student from East Gwillimbury set out to help break

Continued on page 12



John Perry proudly displays his Second Voice Project at Aurora's annual Youth Innovation Fair, held Wednesday night at Aurora Town Square.  
**Auroran photo by Brock Weir**

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# TOWN OF AURORA

# NOTICE BOARD

May 21, 2026



## Council & Committee Meetings

Date	Time	Location	Meeting
Tuesday, May 26	5:45 p.m.	Holland Room	Council Closed Session (if required)
Tuesday, May 26	7 p.m.	Council Chambers	Council
Wednesday, May 27	7 p.m.	Holland Room	Active Transportation and Traffic Safety Advisory Committee
Thursday, May 28	10 a.m.	Video Conference	Aurora Appeal Tribunal/Property Standards Committee (if required)
Tuesday, June 2	9:30 a.m.	Newmarket CC	Joint Council Committee (CYFS)
Tuesday, June 2	5:45 p.m.	Holland Room	Council Closed Session (if required)
Tuesday, June 2	7 p.m.	Council Chambers	Committee of the Whole
Wednesday, June 3	10 a.m.	Video Conference	Mayor's Golf Classic Funds Committee
Monday, June 8	7 p.m.	Holland Room	Heritage Advisory Committee
Wednesday, June 10	10 a.m.	Holland Room	Community Recognition Review Advisory Committee
Wednesday, June 10	7 p.m.	Holland Room	Accessibility Advisory Committee
Thursday, June 11	7 p.m.	Video Conference	Committee of Adjustment

\*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.

## What's Happening

### Interested in running in Aurora's 2026 Municipal Election?



Make a difference in your community and help shape the future of Aurora. If you're passionate about local issues and want to serve your community, consider becoming a candidate in the 2026 Municipal Election.



Learn more about running for Mayor, Councillor, or School Board Trustee.

[aurora.ca/Candidates](https://aurora.ca/Candidates)



## Online Skylight Gallery Exhibition

### Featured Artists: Kate Greenway - A Sense of Place

This exhibition brings together watercolours inspired by landscapes, gardens, animals, birds, and quiet built spaces encountered both close to home and while travelling. Through careful observation and the luminous transparency of watercolour, each painting reflects the character of a particular moment – light on a field, a resting animal, a familiar street, or a distant view. Together the works explore how places shape our experiences and memories, revealing the quiet connections between environment, presence and time. View in-person at Aurora Town Hall in the Skylight Gallery. View online at [aurora.ca/SkylightGallery](https://aurora.ca/SkylightGallery). All work is for sale. Please contact Sarah Reynolds at [sreynolds@aurora.ca](mailto:sreynolds@aurora.ca) if you are interested in investing and owning a beautiful piece of art.

### Get on the voters list for the municipal election on October 26!

RegisterToVoteON.ca  
1.866.242.3025



### CAR WASH FOR UNITED WAY

Saturday, June 20, 2026 | 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Ian Laing Headquarters, Station 4-5  
300 Earl Stewart Drive, Aurora  
Enter through the second driveway on "beacon" Crescent

Cost: Donate what you can to support United Way. Cash, debit or credit.

### Open House: Help shape aurora's future stormwater master plan

Wednesday, May 27 • 5 p.m. to 7 p.m.  
Aurora Public Library

Discover how the Town is planning to reduce flooding, protect streams, and improve stormwater management. Learn about the Master Plan and share where you've seen stormwater challenges. Town staff and consultants will be on site to answer questions and gather your input.



STORMWATER MANAGEMENT MASTER PLAN

Open House

[engageaurora.ca/SWMmasterplanUpdate](https://engageaurora.ca/SWMmasterplanUpdate)

### Join Us AURORA RECREATION FAIR

Thursday, June 11, 2026  
5 p.m. to 7 p.m.

Stronach Aurora Recreation Complex  
Deejardine Gym

[aurora.ca/RecFair](https://aurora.ca/RecFair)



Discover everything Aurora's recreation department has to offer, including a diverse range of recreation programs, services, camps, courses and volunteer opportunities. Find out more about sport development, youth drop-in activities, summer camps, accessible sport options, swimming lessons, registered programs and more! Details at [aurora.ca/RecFair](https://aurora.ca/RecFair).

### NAAW National AccessAbility Week

May 24 to May 30



Ramp Up to National AccessAbility Week in Aurora!

Participate in free activities all week!

[aurora.ca/NAAW](https://aurora.ca/NAAW)



### MUCHMUSIC MEMORIES

Denise Donlon, Rick Campanelli & Bill Welychka, hosted by Andrew Applebaum



JUNE 4, 2026  
7 P.M.

DAVIDE DE SIMONE PERFORMANCE HALL

[Aurora.ca/WhatsOn](https://Aurora.ca/WhatsOn)

Presented by the Aurora Museum & Archives



### Aurora PRIDE FESTIVAL

[AURORA.CA/WHATSON](https://AURORA.CA/WHATSON)

May 31  
1 to 5 p.m.

Opening Ceremonies, Interactive Displays, Pride Inspired Concert (\$20) & more!



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### Aurora Town Hall

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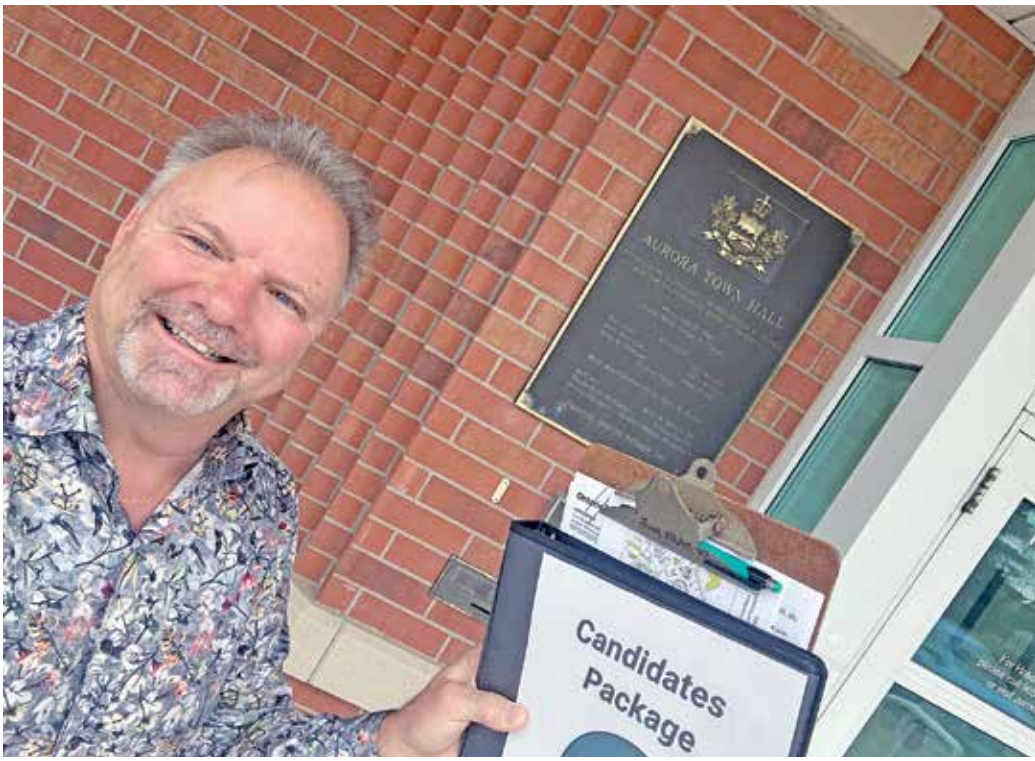
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# Municipal ballot grows with new candidates in Wards 3 and 4

Fraser throws hat in ring for Ward 3, Moledina in Ward 4



Robert James Fraser has formally registered as a Council candidate in Ward 3. **Contributed photo**



Shaheen Moledina, who filed her nomination papers on Friday, is the first Council candidate to come forward for Ward 4. **Auroran photo by Glenn Rodger**

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

The ballot for October's Municipal Election grew last week as two further candidates threw their hats into Council races.

Putting themselves forward last week were Robert James Fraser, who is seeking election in Ward 3, and Shaheen Moledina, who is the first candidate to formally seek election in Ward 4.

This will be the second municipal campaign for Fraser, who last sought election in the 2022 Municipal Election, that time in Ward 6, and the first for Moledina.

**ROBERT JAMES FRASER,  
CANDIDATE – WARD 3**

“My decision to run in Ward 6 was to essentially stop the acclamation of Harold Kim, who was running in Ward 6. I thought there needs to be a race here rather than somebody just being acclaimed, and that’s why I decided

to run outside my ward,” says Fraser, a media sales professional. “The decision this year has been to go into my home ward where I have way more brand recognition because I have been in Aurora for 30-plus years.”

While Kim ultimately won the last race in Ward 6, it didn't sour Fraser on the municipal process and he says running again was always on his mind.

“I’m a big fan of this Town, I’m a big fan of certain things and pieces of direction that I believe need to change in this Town,” he says. “The Mayor’s vision of spending a lot of money in Aurora to create what I’ve heard referenced as a tourist destination, tourist hotspots, I think is delusional thinking. I still have a big commitment to the environment in terms of preserving our existing green spaces and I think we need to be really, really cognizant of, if we’re going to start to increase density, where is that density [for new residential] going to go? We all know there’s an affordable housing crisis. Some of the things around that

point are not in the purview, necessarily, of the Town, but we have greenfield development that could be slated for industrial.

“One of the other things I am contemplating as I formulate my platform, is I would love to see [something like what] the Province forced upon Toronto – some consolidation in the Region. I look at what I pay in property taxes a year for the privilege of living here and if you take a look at York Region – between Richmond Hill, Markham, Vaughan, Aurora, Newmarket, there’s a ton of duplication, and I really think we need to stop with the NIMBYism between different towns within the Region, really look at the Region as a whole, that has some Aurora representation, that has representation from all the communities, but isn’t necessarily doubling up on the admin that is repetitive from town to town.

“Maybe one of my goals for my platform is going to be to force myself out of a job four years from now because

we get some consolidation in the Region with the aspect of bringing savings back to taxpayers right across the Region and getting rid of redundancies.”

**SHAHEEN MOLEDINA –  
CANDIDATE, WARD 4**

Moledina, founder of Active Minds Activity Centre, is the first candidate to put themselves forward for Ward 4.

She says standing for Council is an extension of her community-building work, and the legacy of service instilled in her by her parents after they came to Canada from Tanzania more than 50 years ago.

“We’re a very proud Canadian family and we’ve always believed in doing community service where we live,” she says. “I’m running to be Ward 4 Councillor in Aurora to ensure families, children, seniors, and businesses have a Councillor that will take their voice to Town Hall. Some of the key concerns and priorities in Ward 4 from what I’m

**Continued on page 23**

# MUCHMUSIC MEMORIES

*with*

Denise Donlon, Rick Campanelli & Bill Welychka, hosted by Andrew Applebaum



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MUSEUM & ARCHIVES

**Aurora.ca/WhatsOn**  
Presented by the Aurora Museum & Archives



Aurora  
Town  
Square

**LETTERS TO THE EDITOR**

**Appeal to OLT raises questions, says reader**

The owner at 161 Heathwood Heights has gone to the Ontario Land Tribunal (OLT) to overturn the Town's veto on their developing the site from one home to five.

Newmarket spent \$700,000 fighting the development of the golf course sale at Bathurst and Davis in 2014 and I hate to see what the Town will spend on legal fees to fight development at 161 Heathwood Heights for four more homes.

Remember this is your tax money!

So, the Mayor and Council seem to be a bit elitist as they will fight development when it comes to those that are in a higher value home, as opposed to those that live in a bungalow? Residents have consistently petitioned Council to enact stricter rules regarding the scale and height of new builds, arguing that some developments do not conform to the existing character of mature, established neighbourhoods.

However, we keep seeing these ugly monster homes being built beside bungalows, and it just makes the neighbourhood look dumpy. Where is the Mayor when it comes to these neighbourhoods?

Ask the Mayor how much the legal fees are costing you the taxpayer. This should be transparent to the taxpayer. If the OLT ultimately has the power, then it is foolish for the Mayor to even think of using legal methods to overrule an OLT decision, if in fact they rule in the favour of the owner at 161 Heathwood.

**J. Mills  
Aurora**

**Celebrate Paramedic Services week**

On behalf of York Regional Council and The Regional Municipality of York, I am pleased to recognize Paramedic Services Week 2026 taking place from May 17 to 23, 2026.

This week is an opportunity to thank the dedicated paramedics who serve our communities with professionalism, compassion and extraordinary skill. York Region paramedics respond daily to moments of urgent need, bringing calm and care to crisis and expertise that saves lives.

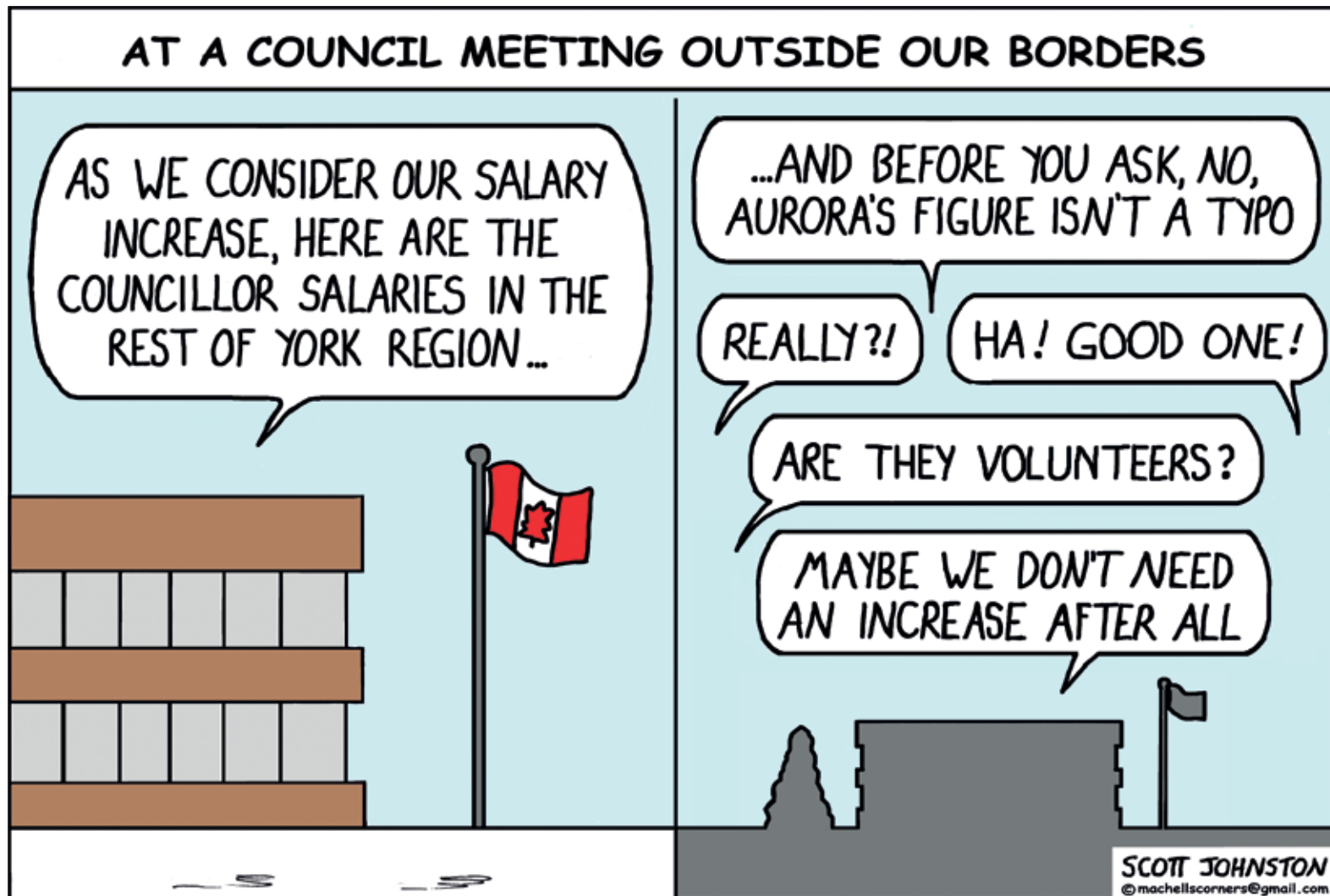
This year's theme, Improving Outcomes Together, reflects what we see across our Region: exceptional patient care built on collaboration. It is the result of paramedics working closely with hospital partners, dispatchers, other emergency services, community agencies and one another to ensure residents receive the right care at the right time.

York Region paramedics continue to demonstrate leadership in advancing patient care. Whether through innovations in clinical practice, strengthening community paramedicine or supporting initiatives that reduce pressure on emergency departments and improve system flow, their work is increasingly proactive, helping residents receive care earlier and closer to home.

Equally important is the compassion they bring to every call. Behind every response is a moment in someone's life that matters deeply. Our paramedics meet those moments with professionalism, empathy and a steadfast commitment to serving others at their most vulnerable moments.

Continued on page 9

**Machell's Corners**



**Maximizing Summer**



**BROCK'S BANTER**

**Brock Weir**

After a long, arduous winter that extended far longer into May than it had any business to, there was a cause for celebration this past weekend when warm weather mercifully coincided with what is, for many, the unofficial start of the Summer Season.

Victoria Day has come and gone, leaving the early foundations of a Canadian summer in its wake, even if the season doesn't technically arrive until the Solstice on Sunday, June 21.

Now, Victoria Day means different things to different people.

Officially, it's an observance of the Sovereign's Official Birthday in Canada, pinned to the third Sunday of each May, a permanent birthday salute to Queen Victoria, the monarch that oversaw the creation of modern Canada and who is often cited as the "Mother of Confederation."

The more history-minded of us might be rather orthodox in celebrating the occasion as it was originally meant to be observed, but Victoria Day isn't necessarily everyone's cup of tea – it is, after all, National Patriots Day in Quebec.

Thankfully Victoria Day can be a choose-your-own-adventure kind of affair.

To that end, this year I have to say I opted to hop off my historical high horse to embrace the spirit of the new season.

The promise of some much-needed warmth after an unseasonably cold and consistently rainy late April and early May, had so many of us counting down the days – and looking for ways to maximize the sun and heat while the going was good.

And maximize it we did.

The weekend kicked off with a lovely barbeque hosted by a friend, which was a great opportunity to catch up, as well as meet several new people, from many different parts of the world, in fact, who offered some unique and valuable perspectives on some of the biggest issues facing our world today. All in all, an enlightening evening in the great outdoors with great company.

The outdoorsy theme continued on Sunday with a family trip to an outdoor antique market near Hamilton. An outing that was also something of a do-over for Mother's Day celebrations, it was a wonderful morning and afternoon of treasure hunting – and, thankfully, there were no shortage of Queen Victoria portraits, busts, commemorative tea cups, and more, to satisfy my history nerdery – followed by a beautiful patio dinner.

Monday, the first Victoria Day in quite some time in which I had an actual day off, was a leisurely day in the City of Toronto, particularly the waterfront area.

The areas around Harbourfront, the Toronto Islands, and places in between,

are always fascinating, and a unique place to unplug and reconnect amid a truly bustling metropolis. It's special ability to allow you to unplug, if only for a little bit, continues unabated, but some of the challenges ahead were never too far from mind.

Walking westward along the boardwalk just behind Harbourfront Centre, for instance, it was hard to miss how exposed the city's landmark Cinesphere, the iconic heart of what was once Ontario Place, has become as work continues to controversially transform the site for generations to come.

It was also hard not to think how much this landscape will change in the coming months, for better or worse, and how so many unanswered questions surrounding the site and the deal may influence what we see down the road.

The view of the Cinesphere was blotted out from time to time by aircraft landing on and taking off from Billy Bishop Airport.

A vital transportation hub on the island, its future is being questioned as the Province of Ontario flexes its muscles to significantly expand the airport to allow for jets, despite the opposition of the City of Toronto, the residents who live on the island, the majority of residents in the city beyond the waterfront, and advocates who have been sounding significant environmental alarms.

A quick ferry trip across the water only highlights both the environmental significance and the fragility of the island itself as a brief walk along the beach near the airport reveals a shoreline that has been nothing short of decimated by the winter elements, a problem that gets worse with each passing season, and little done to address it.

The start of summer – officially or unofficially – was a busy one, and that's a pace that is only set to continue until it, well, doesn't.

As the end of May approaches, it

often feels like it is crunch time for so many people in the community to get stuff done, cramming in just about every announcement, gala, school fair, fundraiser, and more into a very short period of time, the idea being that once June wraps up, the entire community either decamps to a cottage or tunes out to enjoy the slower pace of the season and all that comes with it.

While I believe that has long been an outmoded idea as the economic realities of cottage ownership, vacation planning, and even weekend getaways are what they are, it's an idea that persists – and that's a shame, particularly in an election year.

Whether it's the transformation of Ontario Place, the potential expansion of Billy Bishop Airport, and the environmental precariousness of the island its attached to, all of these decisions, or lack thereof in the case of island restoration, are all three issues that rely and have relied on something that all too many of us take for granted today – the simple vote. And at all levels of government.

The approach of summer might seem like a time to slow down where you can, take in all the season has to offer, and recharge your batteries. While that's all well and good, it's important in a municipal election year like this to stay engaged, consider your own priorities, the future you want for yourselves and others, and the best possible paths to achieve those goals.

Municipal politics has never been the "sexiest" politics offered by our three levels of government but, at the end of the day, it's the level of government that has the most immediate impact on your lives.

To that end, it's essential to stay in the loop rather than go into the voting booth uninformed – or, worse, not at all.

On the other side of the coin, if you're running for a leadership position in our communities, you're gearing up for one heck of a job interview.

Summer might be a great time to attend events, shake some hands, get your faces out there, and gain some new name recognition, but it's also a great time to be used wisely in getting your positions out there, listen to what voters are saying, and show how you'll be able to foster what the community is looking for.

Economic circumstances largely beyond our control will likely make the arguable summer exodus a thing of the past, at least for the time being.

The only thing we can do is make the most of it – for now and in the future.

**THE AUROAN**

Aurora's Community Newspaper

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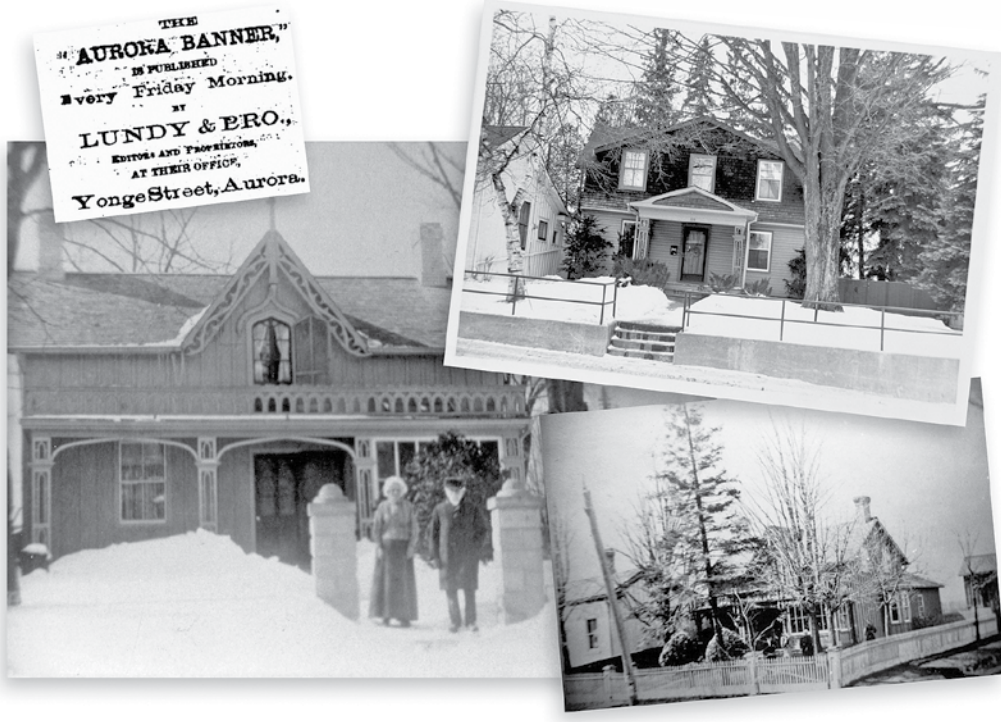
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To submit a letter to the editor, please send your email to brock@jpcmedia.ca. Deadline for submissions is Sunday at 1 p.m.





Pictured here are several views of Horace Dean Lundy's home on Yonge Street. Accurately described by our Time Traveler, the home features a number of the trappings of the Gothic Revival movement that has been so celebrated at Hillary House. Horace and Catherine posed for the leftmost photo outside their home around 1900 (84.101), and another angle (X85.1715), showing the thorny bargeboard and gently sloped arches that fell out of fashion over the years. With changing sensibilities, the entire façade of the house has been altered dramatically. The newest photo, from 1984, shows the balcony removed and central gable widened, while the covered porch was narrowed and topped by a more classically inspired pediment. We hope that Horace and Catherine would be proud to see their house still standing, although they might not recognize it!

Horace Dean Lundy was born in Whitchurch township in 1836. His father was a farmer and a tanner.

The adult Horace would turn his hand to several occupations over the years, all of them indicating a skill in the use of tools and machinery. His first documented trade, in the early 1860s, was that of carriagemaker. He was located in Aurora.

In 1864 he purchased a parcel of land at the south corner of Yonge and Reuben streets. A house was soon erected. It accommodated Horace, his wife Catharine, and the first two of the five children they would ultimately have.

The house was a somewhat less expensive version of Hillary House, the National Historic Site on Yonge north of Wellington. It was a board-and-batten structure, unlike the brick Hillary House, but it shared features such as the distinctive pointed front gable and a good deal of fancy woodwork – but not quite so fancy as on the house to the north. The house has since been modernized.

In 1872, Horace gave up carriage-making and along with his brother Sylvester purchased the Aurora Banner newspaper and printing business. “Lundy & Bro.” was the name used for the general printing business. Which one was the “bro”?

In the early 1880s Horace turned to paper box manufacturing, at first



## Time Travellers Diary

By Jacqueline Stuart

### Kaboom!

independently and later as foreman for the box department at the Underhill shoe factory.

In the first decade of the twentieth century Mr. Lundy undertook a daring enterprise: the provision of acetylene lighting. In its most basic terms: water is dropped on to calcium carbide pellets and acetylene gas is formed; the gas is then piped to a fixture or fixtures and lighted.

In 1900 Horace began producing this gas on a small scale, then in 1901 built a large generator behind the Banner building on the west side of Yonge. The gas was piped to numerous Yonge Street businesses, the huge Methodist church, and some private homes.

Acetylene produces a very white, bright light and I thought it would be interesting to see it in action. On the

evening of April 30, 1910, I stepped out of my time machine just outside the newspaper building.

**KABOOM!** I heard screams and could see orange light down the alleyway leading to the rear. I hurried down the steps. The interior of the acetylene gas building was on fire! Other people were also running toward the site. I saw them assist a white-haired man and a woman out of the building. In no time at all the fire brigade was in action, and the building as a whole was saved. I came back to the present.

It turned out that Mr. Lundy had been checking the gas plant when he noticed a leak. He did not turn off the light in the building and gas continued to pour out. The gas soon filled the space and then spontaneously exploded. For some reason Mrs. Lundy was there and both she and her husband suffered burns: it is amazing that they were not killed. The generator was destroyed.

Within about two weeks the acetylene plant was working again. This form of gas lighting continued locally for several years but of course was eventually replaced by electricity.

Horace Dean Lundy died in 1915. This was seven years before the birth of one of his great-grandchildren, who was skilled at lighting up her surroundings and millions of television screens: Betty White.

We all must have a lot of stuff.

How else would you explain the rapid growth in self-storage places, including several sizable ones that have set up shop here in Aurora over the past few years.

I can see the need for a storage unit in certain temporary circumstances... to clear space to allow for renovations, or to store possessions between moves, for example.

But I expect many people use them to store things they don't have room for, but can't bear to part with. Old clothes, toys, furniture, files, china, books, electronics, sports equipment... You never know when you might need them, especially if in your mind they're still good, or at least “goodish.”

The problem with that is that once they're out of your house, these items become an “out of sight, out of mind” sort of situation. The longer you don't use them, the less likely you will. And unless you're storing something valuable (Ming vase, signed Beatles guitar, T-rex skull, original Group of Seven artwork), the longer it stays locked away, the less value it has.

If you had tried to sell it when you initially didn't need it, you may have gotten \$50 for that piece of furniture, but after 10 years gathering dust and housing rodents in a storage locker, you're more likely to have to pay to get rid of it. Not counting, of course, the storage costs incurred during that time.



## INSIDE AURORA

Scott Johnston

### A Lot of Stuff

While it's a bit more extreme to rent extra space to house stuff of dubious use or value, we're all guilty of hoarding to various degrees. Garages, basements, attics, spare rooms, drawers, sheds, crawl spaces, closets, even cottages fill up with unnecessary stuff.

Whether it's due to sentimental value, or just our own inertia in taking the plunge to tackle it, it's often hard to purge, or part with, all that clutter.

But whether you blitz and clean out your entire house in one go, or just take it in smaller chunks, a closet at a time, if you have the willpower, there are lots of ways you can easily dispose of things.

You can toss or recycle it, whether it's an old couch or bookcase dragged out to the curb for pickup, or an old TV, VCR or printer dropped off at one of the Town's e-Waste events.

If an item such as a figurine, scrapbook, kitchen item or tool has some sort of sentimental value it can be given to family or friends, if they

truly want it, of course.

Donations are another option. Clothes, books, small appliances, china and other items in reasonable shape can be dropped off at, or picked up by, various local charities.

If you think you have something for which you can actually make some money, you can list it on buy and sell sites like Kijiji or Facebook marketplace.

The other obvious way of disposing of things that's especially noticeable on weekends this time of year throughout Aurora is the garage sale.

If you like putting up signs in your neighbourhood, getting up at the crack of dawn on the weekend, scrounging tables to put things on, hauling stuff out into your driveway, and haggling endlessly over the 25 cent price you've put on that snow globe you got on your way through Wawa in 1997, this may be route for you.

Better yet, you can let the Town do the advertising and participate in the Community Garage Sale being held in the SARC parking lot on May 30.

The trick with that one is to not spend too much time enthusiastically browsing the other tables. After all, the whole point of the decluttering exercise is to ensure that you leave with fewer items than you came with.

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

Neil A.  
Aurora

## Can Council unite in support of the Heritage Permit for Victoria Hall?

The Heritage Advisory Committee (HAC) was not unanimous in its disapproval of the proposed design for Victoria Hall. In fact, one member expressed support of what was presented — therefore, no consensus.

In fact, the committee does not record a vote, nor is there any decision on matters coming out of HAC; Council is not bound.

The committee's comments, reflected in the minutes, are approved by its members prior to being sent to Council. Members of Council should review the comments raised by each member at the meeting in addition to how they were addressed by staff and the architects before formulating a decision.

During this particular discussion, all questions and concerns from HAC members were addressed effectively but not necessarily received as such. The dominant discussion of incompatibility continues to persist despite the proposal's adherence to the principles laid out in the Ontario Heritage Toolkit – a supporting document to the Heritage Act.

This was explained by the architects and staff during the discussion.

Any suggestions that the guiding principles of the aforementioned framework should be disregarded ignores accepted best practices in the specialty of heritage architecture.

There should be a fundamental understanding of these principles when reviewing public projects. It is the responsibility of lawmakers to ascribe to higher standards within the Ontario Heritage Act's documents and avoid the emotional and politically charged opposition that has subsequently ensued.

In consideration of the toolkit, the proposed addition presents a clear distinction in style and materiality to distinguish itself from the heritage building. It also reflects the current moment in architecture, as it should.

The new addition is sensitive, diminutive in scale and occupies the exact footprint of the existing addition while offering easier, better access to the building with integration to the Square (ie: functionality).

In compliance with the Heritage Trust, the original Victoria Hall will have its elements restored and repaired. The Gothic shaped transom over the front entrance will be uncovered and restored. These improvements will be further enhanced by the simplicity of the contemporary addition that does not blur the lines, seek attention, nor imitate through historical replication.

This is what is meant by best practice.

As citizens, we deserve an investment that integrates Victoria Hall into our recently inaugurated Town Square regardless how we feel about past debates related to cost, process, or end use.

There is a responsibility to operate within objective reality when approving this permit. We risk so much in lowering our standards by giving in to visceral response. Ignoring qualified and certified professionals is not the path to excellence.

Respectfully, the committee has every right to and should ask focussed questions.

Equally, they should listen carefully to the answers and provide comments within their purview.

In turn, Council should understand what is relevant to the decision at hand and what is not.

For example, the opinion expressed that creating wheelchair access is not worth losing two parking spaces is obviously not relevant.

If we are to put our faith in what the committee believes, its members must be adequately informed, focussed on what is in their purview, and argue in good faith.

Our elected representatives, who will ultimately decide for all of us should, in good faith, be judging this decision based on objective truth, its adherence to best practices, and the delivery of design excellence, rather than distracting us with battles they have likely already lost.

Otherwise, we all lose.

# Provincial authorities now involved in Heiniu investigation

BY BROCK WEIR  
EDITOR  
LOCAL JOURNALISM  
INITIATIVE REPORTER

The Province of Ontario's Animal Welfare Services Branch is among the multi-level bodies that are now investigating the death of Heiniu, a rottweiler that lost its life during an Animal Control call in East Gwillimbury involving Aurora officers.

At issue was an Animal Control call to two dogs running at large in the Holland Landing community on May 4.

The call resulted in the death of

Heiniu, one of the two dogs in question, leaving its owners, the family that corralled the two dogs, and community members alike left asking questions and seeking justice.

Earlier this month, photos and videos of the dog lying on a driveway with blood appearing to be coming out of its mouth sparked widespread anger, culminating in a "Justice for Heiniu" rally held at Aurora Town Hall and along Wellington Street East on May 9.

In addition to calls for justice, those who rallied in solidarity called for a more fulsome response from the Town

of Aurora.

While some say they are still waiting for that response, Mayor Tom Mrakas offered a formal statement on behalf of Council at last week's General Committee meeting, followed by an update from Municipal Solicitor Patricia De Sario.

"I want to acknowledge the tragic incident that occurred last week and the concern being expressed by members of the public following the death of Heiniu, a rottweiler in East Gwillimbury," said Mayor Mrakas. "Our thoughts are with the dog owners, the witnesses, responders, and everyone affected by this difficult incident."

In her statement, Ms. De Sario noted she has cautioned elected officials from speaking further on the matter as the investigation continues.

"The Town is reviewing the matter and cooperating with the dog owners, appropriate authorities and oversight bodies, including the Province's Animal Welfare Services Branch, Public Safety Division," she said. "As this process is ongoing, the Town is unable to provide additional details at this time. While I appreciate that some members of the public may be frustrated by the limited information that can be shared at this stage, the Town is limited in what information can be publicly disclosed due to legal obligations relating to privacy, employment matters, procedural fairness, and the integrity of the ongoing review process."

"Given the above and the potential for litigation, Mayor and members of Council and staff are advised not to comment further, please, and the Town

will provide additional information when appropriate and able to do so."

While Council members are unable to comment at this time, Ward 1 Councillor Ron Weese said he appreciated the updates.

"It's important they (the public) know that we're being as transparent as we can on this and what they can expect and when," he said.

In a statement issued by the Town of Aurora following last Saturday's rally the Town confirmed the basic details of the incident.

"Animal Services staff responded to a call involving two dogs at large on May 4 in East Gwillimbury," said Carley Smith, Manager of Corporate Communications for the Town of Aurora. "During efforts to safely secure one of the dogs, an officer sustained a bite injury requiring medical attention. Due to escalating safety concerns and the presence of bystanders, Animal Services Officers contacted York Regional Police for assistance."

"Throughout the incident, staff attempted to safely calm, care for, and secure the dog while protecting public safety. The dog later became medically unresponsive and transported to a veterinary clinic. This was a difficult and upsetting incident for everyone involved, including staff, witnesses, and the owners. The Town is reviewing the incident, and a full investigation is underway."

Witnesses continue to question the details of the statement and, in particular, the conduct of attending officers.

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NEW DIGS – The Aurora Food Pantry showed off their new digs on Mary Street with a community open house on May 11. Now located at 16 Mary Street, Unit 6, the open house and the annual general meeting that followed was a great opportunity to learn more about the programs and services offered by the local food bank. Among the visitors were Mayor Tom Mrakas, far left, who was joined by Graeme, Maureen, Sandra, Lori, Angela, and Sharon.

Auroran photo by Glenn Rodger

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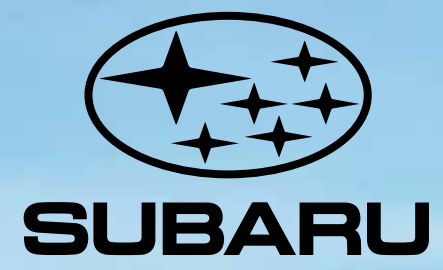
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# BUSINESS & FINANCE



**LIBRARY CELEBRATES 30,000 SMILES** – The Aurora Public Library was all smiles on Wednesday, May 13, as they received a donation of \$33,882 from local Tim Hortons Restaurants. The Aurora Public Library was the local beneficiary of this spring's Smile Cookie Campaign where 100 per cent of sales from Smile Cookies sold between April 27 and May 3 went back to select community organizations. "This incredible support from Tim Hortons will help strengthen collections, programs, services, and learning opportunities at Aurora Public Library," said CEO Jodi Marr. "While we are still working through the specific details of how the funds will be allocated, we know the impact will be felt across the community, and we are truly grateful." Marr, far right, is pictured here at Wednesday's cheque presentation alongside Yash Maharaj, Manager of Franchise Performance for Tim Hortons, Rachana Seth, Tim Hortons Franchise Owner, Navjot Kaur, Tim Hortons manager, and Tim's franchise owner Drew Alford. **Auroran photo by Glenn Rodger**

## Council, public divided on future use of Victoria Hall

From page 1

Ward 5's Councillor Gallo. "There's only so much I can say, but I believe that we're making a mistake and there are things yet to be decided. I don't agree with the direction that is being

proposed."

Added Councillor Gaertner: "I'm not in favour of this, either. I don't believe it's in residents' best interests."

Mayor Mrakas, on the other hand, offered a different viewpoint.

"I'll say I do believe this is in the best interest of the Town, the residents, and it's part of revitalizing our downtown," he said. "I think residents in this community [will be] very, very excited once they find out the details, which will hopefully be coming out as soon as possible."

While the lease agreement is still under wraps, last week's meeting was also an opportunity for Council to speak on a number of documents related to the controversial renovation plan for Victoria Hall that were previously subject to Closed Session confidentiality.

While some members welcomed the release of the documents, others said disclosures did not go far enough – particularly as they relate to the future tenancy and use of the building.

One document missing from the disclosure, said Ward 1 Councillor Ron Weese, related to the scope of work that will be carried out on the building, which he said was important "because it identifies the intent of the use of the facility," including a note that part of the intent is to create a space "to generate an economically sustainable model for the operators."

"I guess the assumption here is that this is going to be a commercial use, as opposed to just the refurbishment, so the purpose of the document was to uncover some of these things... and it would have been good to have this information well in advance," said Councillor Weese, referencing concerns offered by residents at the podium earlier in the meeting.

"The respondents [to an RFP] were asked to prepare a comprehensive business model to the scope of work for improving and leasing the Hall, which implies commercial use once again, not community use."

Responding to Councillor Weese was Aurora CAO Doug Nadorozny who said the RFP was not "specifically geared to necessarily commercial use," but it was an option on the table.

The RFP called for pitches on the use of the historic Aurora Armoury, previously home to a campus of Niagara College's Canadian Food and Wine Institute, the café space at Aurora Town Hall, which was also operated by Niagara College, and Victoria Hall.

Since Slabtown Cider Company took over the Armoury last year,

and Newmarket's My Indie Coffee the Aurora Town Square café space, Victoria Hall was the last piece of the puzzle.

Nadorozny noted the "significance" of the Victoria Hall building to the community was considered in the process, which was "consistent with the aims of the Town in terms of developing these properties [into] spaces that could be leveraged by the community."

Also raising questions on the disclosure was Councillor Gallo, who questioned why documents related to the Class D cost estimate to renovate Victoria Hall also remain under wraps.

Staff said 23 documents related to Victoria Hall were examined for disclosure and this was one of four "flagged for further review." The reason, they said, is these documents involve third-party financial information and were subject to ongoing negotiation on potential procurement.

"This information was shared with Council during the initial debate by me and at the time...we had checked with the consultant, they were fine with it, they wanted to have some things clarified, but, in essence, they were fine with it," said Nadorozny. "I believe I used wording to the effect of, 'We would prefer this information remained private' because of this procurement that we have not completed."

"It's just a timing thing. We're happy to issue that full report eventually, but, as a normal course of business, we wouldn't put our preliminary estimates and so on in anticipation of ultimately going to the market to get a quote."

Councillor Gallo nevertheless said the decision to keep this confidential was "disappointing" to the public.

"I think they have every right to see this," he contended. "There's a lot of value to that document, to the public, to have full transparency on how we make decisions and it's disappointing to see that. You have a consultant, the author, saying okay, we have this Council, I believe, saying okay, there's no link to the third party [and] we can't release it to the public. That's not transparency. That is not the way we should be conducting businesses on a \$2.1 million project. It's disappointing to see, but it is what it is. Control is clearly out of our hands. Other people, staff, make the final decision."

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# Neighbours push back on “restaurant” use of Victoria Hall

BY BROCK WEIR  
EDITOR  
LOCAL JOURNALISM  
INITIATIVE REPORTER

The future use of Victoria Hall is yet to be formally announced, but if a restaurant is in the cards, area residents say the idea is half-cooked.

Residents came to Council Chambers last week to speak out on a \$2.1 million plan to refurbish the historic landmark, located on the southwest corner of Mosley and Victoria Streets, and are set to underscore their positions in a demonstration planned for outside Victoria Hall this Thursday night, May 21, from 7 – 8 p.m.

While the delegates to last week’s Committee meeting didn’t question the value of preserving and refurbishing a heritage building, they say form dictates function – and the function is worth another look.

“I’m speaking today as both a resident of the Town Park community and as a member of the Heritage Advisory Committee,” said Linda Durringer. “The Town has still not clearly confirmed the intended use of the building, yet all signs point to a restaurant operation. Why are there detailed plans coming to light only now for a restaurant that are dated May 2025 and August 2025? Why has so much of this project felt secretive and undercover?”

“Residents deserve transparency. Why has there been so little disclosure about the long-term plan for Victoria Hall? The public deserves clarity regarding the costs of taxpayers funding a full restaurant conversion, complete with commercial infrastructure and equipment, rather than simply addressing the building’s structural, mechanical and accessibility needs? If so, residents should have been informed openly from the beginning.”

A key component of the restoration and renovation plan is the creation of a glass atrium, set to replace the existing

addition to the rear of Victoria Hall, in a bid to increase the building’s accessibility and better tie it in to the balance of the Aurora Town Square redevelopment.

Durringer said this atrium comes at a significant expense, but its “purpose and justification have never been properly explained to the public.”

“What is equally troubling is that Council appears willing to repeat the mistake that are already affecting our neighbourhood today with the Armoury,” she continued. “Now the Town appears prepared to introduce another restaurant-style operation into the same community without openly addressing the impacts on the residents.

“Why does the Town want to become a commercial landlord and restaurant operator? Why would the Town subsidize a restaurant? Is it truly the role of a municipal government? The entire process, from the design, to the cost escalation, to the lack of public disclosure has lacked transparency from the beginning. Restaurants deserve honesty, consultation, [and] accountability, especially when dealing with a treasured heritage property that belongs to the community. I just wonder why you didn’t just come out at the beginning and say you’re going to turn Victoria Hall into a restaurant?”

“I sincerely hope the new Council elected in October will better understand the impact these decisions have on the small Town Park community and will commit to a more transparent and respectful process moving forward.”

Similar concerns were voiced by resident John Hartman who questioned why Council members said “no final decision had been made” on the building’s use when diagrams showed a restaurant/bar reconfiguration.

He suggested the final decision on Victoria Hall’s use and role in the community be postponed until after

October’s municipal election.

“I really thank you very much for coming in with your views and all the passion that you’ve spoken about Victoria Hall. I know that we’re trying our best to do the best we can to reflect the investments that we make in a very nice heritage piece,” responded Ward 2 Councillor Rachel Gilliland. “Council did receive an email from a former member of the Heritage Committee who served many, many years on the heritage committee is very, very passionate about Heritage in the area and actually has a home in that area and wrote a very lengthy email to Council to express the support and the design and this is somebody who’s also as a professional designer in protecting heritage. So, I thought it was actually very nice to receive this email from this person because normally they’re very critical.

“It was very pleasant to hear that there are two sides of the pendulum, that there are people that do recognize that and there are some positive attributes to that so I just thought I’d share that because there’s other there’s always different sides to it.”

Concerns over the use, however, were voiced by Ward 3 Councillor Wendy Gaertner, who said a restaurant use would exacerbate an identified area parking issue.

“Growth and New is very important to service the new residents that come into Aurora,” said Councillor Gaertner, referencing how money held in reserve for growth will be used in this project. “They have a lot of other needs and we have a lot of restaurants in Aurora. Just going back to the traffic in the area, we know [the] parking situation was bad before we built Library Square [sic] and...in a restaurant business there’s a lot of staff and hopefully they’ll take public transit – but, if not, their parking issue is going to add concern to the neighbourhood.”

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

From page 4

This week also offers a meaningful chance to connect with the community through Family Fun Day on Saturday, May 23, 2026, in the Town of East Gwillimbury. This event offers residents and families an opportunity to meet the people behind the uniform and learn more about the important work they do every day.

During Paramedic Services Week, we extend our sincere gratitude to all paramedics and emergency communications professionals who support them. We also recognize their families and colleagues who support them in this demanding and essential work.

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# Role of Heritage Committee questioned following Victoria Hall approval

BY BROCK WEIR  
EDITOR  
LOCAL JOURNALISM  
INITIATIVE REPORTER

The advancement of significant renovations to Victoria Hall, and yet-to-be-disclosed information on its future use, have left some residents and Council members alike questioning the role and value of Aurora's Heritage Advisory Committee.

These concerns were raised at both the podium and the Council last week as the accuracy of a staff report on the Victoria Hall restoration was brought into question.

The report by the Town's Heritage

Planner, Adam Robb, noted at last month's Heritage Advisory Committee (HAC) meeting, questions were raised "regarding the compatibility of the modern rear addition relevant to the historic character of Victoria Hall. Preference given to using bricks or trying to match the style of Victoria Hall through the addition and not use glass."

Additional "concerns" noted in the report were shifting the main entrance of Victoria Hall from Mosley to Victoria Street, the scale of the addition, architectural style and more.

Critics of the report said the report does not the outright rejection of the addition expressed by many HAC members.

"The Heritage Advisory Committee, or HAC, is comprised of six dedicated knowledgeable and committed community volunteers, plus one staff and one Council member. Their meetings are open to the public, minutes are taken, forum is recorded," said resident John Hartman, one of two residents who raised the issue at last week's Committee of the Whole meeting. "The HAC 'advises and assists on all matters related to the conservation of buildings of historic and architectural value, and on all matters really relating to the designation and preservation of Heritage Conservation Districts in accordance with the Ontario Heritage Act.'

"For me, the very key words are 'on all matters.' I attended that meeting, my very first, as I wanted to learn more about this divisive project. I listened to every member ask questions and seek clarity on Vic Hall and, in the end, unanimously said no to the form and the proposed design. It was crystal clear.... Following that meeting several weeks later, a staff report dated May 12 that came out that no way mimics what was said in that forum. There is very little, if any, noted

pushback on the proposed design and preservation of Vic Hall. You get it. I get it. You've paid thousands of dollars for an architectural firm for their input and not paid volunteers who are committed and longstanding Aurorans. I strongly suggest that each Council member...listen to that committee recording and come to your own conclusion."

This viewpoint was bolstered by HAC member Linda Durringer, who said the Committee provided "comments, concerns, and suggestions" on the future of "this important heritage building... yet it appears none of those concerns were meaningfully considered."

"The Committee was generally not in support of the proposed design. This raises a serious question: why have the Heritage Advisory Committee if the advice of the Committee is ignored?"

Aurora's HAC is currently chaired by Ward 3 Councillor Wendy Gaertner, who has previously served on the Committee. In her experience, she said she had never seen such "unanimous opposition" on the Committee than what was offered on April 13.

Ward 5 Councillor John Gallo noted he too was at the meeting and said it was "very hard" to "completely ignore all the comments" made at the Committee.

"They had many great suggestions, but they simply did not agree with the presented idea, architectural feel, for many, many reasons," he said. "I think we need to stand beside and behind our Committees. I wouldn't be surprised if some of them said, 'What do you need me for? Why are you asking me for my opinion, my time, and my volunteerism? You've asked me to be here for this specific reason, I gave you input, and you completely ignore it.'"

Ward 1 Councillor Ron Weese noted he valued the input of all of Aurora's Advisory Committees and, particularly, the

"expertise that exists" on HAC.

"Because Ward 1 has two heritage areas, cultural district as well as the heritage area, and the buildings and features within it, I've naturally learned a lot about the importance of and preservation of heritage, both in the natural as well as the built form in Aurora. I also attend many of the meetings. Although I'm not a member, I attended this particular meeting and have seldom seen such a unanimous objection to the permit application, and I agree with their stance and we'll be voting against this permit for that reason, and others that are incompatible with the neighborhood."

An alternate viewpoint, however, was offered by Ward 2 Councillor Rachel Gilliland who shared comments received by a resident who previously served on the Committee.

"The comment was, and this is somebody who is a trained professional: 'In addition to the new access point at the rear of the building as presented will provide greater flexibility and integration to the new Town Square. The style of the new addition is quiet, lightweight and elegant. The contrast and materials and form are exactly what has become standard practice and expanding heritage assets for repurpose. I understand people's tastes vary, but I feel that this is a transcendental way to approach projects of this nature. Ultimately, the outcome will be honest, unencumbered and clearly defined what is the original Victoria Hall, and what isn't.'"

"I guess I feel really compelled to read this because... this is coming from an individual where we'll get two different pendulum swings from this person's opinion on all sides of heritage, so when I first received this letter of support, I was quite surprised and I really take a lot of weight in the opinion from this person."



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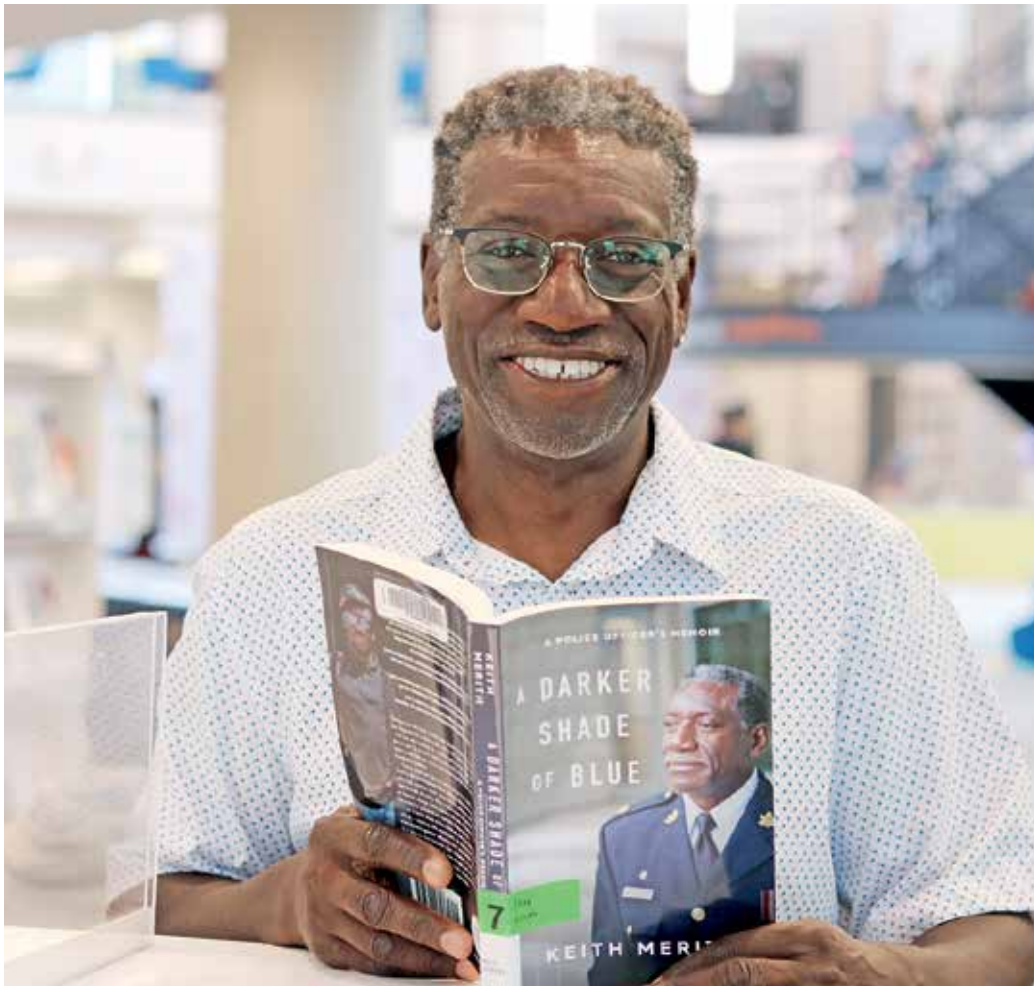
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# Darker Shade of Blue brings Merith's story to life on big screen

Doc based on book by YRP's Keith Merith



Keith Merith is pictured at the local launch of his book, *A Darker Shade of Blue*, at the Aurora Public Library in 2024. **Photo by Lucy Frechette**

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

In his memoir, "A Darker Shade of Blue", retired York Regional Police Inspector Keith Merith didn't hold back on some of the more troubling challenges he faced as one of the few Black officers on the force.

His unflinching look at experience with racism from both inside and outside policing, and efforts to bring about a change in culture within kick-started important community conversations when it was first published in 2024 – and it's set to do so again as the subject of a new documentary, which will make its Aurora debut next Wednesday, May 27, at Cineplex Aurora.

The screening will begin at 6.30 p.m. and will be followed by a chance to meet the cast and crew.

The documentary, "A Darker Shade of Blue: 30 Years Behind the Badge" is billed as a "powerful" look at "truth, justice, and resilience inside law enforcement. Directed and produced by Irina Volkova and Markham's ECG (Ethnic Channels Group) Productions, it combines on-camera interviews, firsthand accounts, and re-enactment to bring Merith's story to life, showing "the emotional and institutional

challenges faced by officers of colour, while exploring themes of courage, integrity, and reform."

"At its heart, *A Darker Shade of Blue* is not only a story about policing – it is a story about perseverance," say producers. "The documentary examines systemic barriers within institutions, the personal cost of speaking out, and the power of community alliances forged in the face of adversity.... The film blends personal testimony with historical context, shedding light on decades of cultural change within law enforcement. The result is a deeply human portrait of one man's commitment to justice – both on the streets and within the system itself."

Reflecting on the journey from book to screen, Merith tells *The Auroran* says he's "hoping for good things" as his story reaches new audiences.

"The documentary walks them down a path; it takes them on a journey with me from the beginnings of joining a police department, from the internal workings of a police department, being a member of the service and being Black," he says. "It brings them into that dimension I'm sure most of them have never experienced before."

The message at the core of both the book and the documentary, he adds, is "we all can do better."

"There's really no reason for treating people the way people have been treated. Even though you see on the outside a police service that is supposed to be looking after their citizens, what's really happening? What's their thought process? How are they delivering that service? Is it in the best way? Well, not so much. I ask a lot of questions, I get little answers from the organization. There's a lot of lip service, and I'm not just talking about my service, I'm talking right across the country and Canadian policing because that's what I deal with specifically. It's an awareness for the general public there's a lot of work to be done in holding people accountable for their behaviour."

Since he began sharing his story,

Merith says he's had "outstanding, phenomenal" feedback from officers who served with him, including "tough, hard cops I worked with who told me they were shaken by the stories I told."

"Some of them didn't know what was going on. Some of them knew what was going on and did nothing about it. Some of them were complicit, and they were very raw with me when they reached out," he says. "A number of them were in tears when I was talking to them. They didn't realize how much it affected me and others like me, their behavior. That to me was so gratifying. I didn't expect that reaction from cops. I really didn't. I know the community would join in with me, the changemakers and people that want to know what's going on. I knew that would happen. But the coppers? That threw me off. That really did."

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# Local youth wow with solutions for future at Youth Innovation Fair

From page 1

down barriers in front of them.

The result of his work is the Second Voice Project, an augmented communication application that helps those with voice challenges fully communicate with those around them.

Perry's software, which has garnered significant interest from Google, took home top honours in the Senior category at last week at Aurora's annual Youth Innovation Fair.

Held at Aurora Town Square, the Youth Innovation Fair brings together youth of all ages from across York Region to showcase solutions they have come up with to address the challenges of today to help foster a better tomorrow.

Eager to evaluate this year's submissions were judges Wendy Browne of the Rotary Club, Aurora Citizen of the Year Sandy Bundy, Anthony Garramone of the Aurora Seniors' Centre's Men's Shed, Aurora Public Library Board Chair Lauren Hanna, past Youth Innovation Fair participants and members of Aurora's Youth Engagement Committee.

"What stood out wasn't just your creativity, it was your compassion," said Mayor Tom Mrakas, speaking to participants and their families in the Aurora Town Square Performance Hall. "You tackled real challenges, imagined better futures, and worked to improve the lives of others. That combination is both powerful and rare. It shows that you don't have to grow up, wait your turn, or get more experience for ideas to matter. The problems you see today are real and your perspectives matter because they are fresh, honest and bold."

Improving the lives of others was certainly the mission for Perry and his Second Voice Project.

"I myself have a physical disability and one of the biggest things is I have several friends with voice needs and I wanted to



Arwin Ghahremanian and Dylan Jiang are pictured explaining their Self-Sorting Garbage Bin at last week's Youth Innovation Fair. **Auroran photo by Brock Weir**

give back to this community and it's been really nice to be able to," he shared. "A good friend of mine that I played hockey with was kind of excluded from group activities because of his lack of ability to speak in that regard. When he started using [this tool], he's now going to college, and there are all kinds of great things that are coming out of that."

Last summer, Perry decided to take Second Voice to the next level and submitted it to Google for Startups on what he said was a "Hail Mary" thinking it would "never go anywhere."

He was braced for rejection when he saw he had a response from the tech giant, but it was anything but.

"It's now powered by one of Google's speech models, so there's a lot of stuff that we've been able to do with their help," says Perry. "It's about helping people and helping kids. We are a business now, so obviously there are other factors at play, but my biggest thing was I didn't build this for money. This was never about making money. What's been really nice is seeing that I'm able to help people."

Giving a helping hand to the environment was just one factor that secured Grade 8 students Arwin Ghahremanian and Dylan Jiang with their Self-Sorting Garbage Bin.

The Self-Sorting Garbage Bin concept uses an AI-powered camera, programmed by more than 5,000 individual photographs taken by the students of various examples of garbage, to create a sensor that can sort waste into different compartments as it gets tossed in the bin.

"We noticed a lot of our classmates are lazy. We have three bins – compost, recycling, and waste – and we'd see a classmate do a back-handed toss to whatever bin and with whatever garbage they had and thought, 'Why don't we just solve that problem for them?' If you're going to be lazy, at least do it in a smart way. The greatest mathematicians are the laziest, always trying to find a shortcut, so we created this machine that sorts the trash for you."

The duo's concept involves bins equipped with their own modem, connected to a network, that is sustainable, "self-reliable" and doesn't rely on external sources of power.

They see many more applications for their product beyond the school environment.

"In large malls, people can be very careless, especially in food courts. They would just dump everything on their tray into the garbage and wouldn't take the time to pick out each thing," says Arwin.

"Here, they could just throw the garbage into one chute and out of that chute it would sort all the garbage into different areas."

## THIS YEAR'S WINNERS

### JUNIOR CATEGORY

**WINNER:** Eyal Jorchatov  
- Ice Build Up Machine

### HONOURABLE MENTION:

Kelly Guo, Chloe Huan,  
Ivy Wang - Green Energy

### HONOURABLE MENTION:

Yejoon Kim, Olivia Park, Eric  
Shivdky, Brian Zhang  
- Boney Jr Robot

### INTERMEDIATE CATEGORY

**WINNER:** Arwin Ghahremanian,  
Dylan Jiang - Garbage Sorter

### HONOURABLE MENTION:

Kristi Brkic, Maelle Hamilton,  
Zoey Rabinovich - Comfy Curls

### HONOURABLE MENTION:

Ayden Arabi, Allegra Buchanan,  
Amaya Gajadhar, Ethan  
Gadadhar, Madeline Northrup,  
Patrick Northrup, Chase  
Sullivan - Arcaomath

### SENIOR CATEGORY

**WINNER:** John Perry  
- Second Voice Project



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# Plan to interpret racially-insensitive markers at Pet Cemetery raises questions

BY BROCK WEIR  
EDITOR  
LOCAL JOURNALISM  
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Nearly a century later, they remain almost-forgotten memorials for some of Aurora's smallest residents – but some of the tributes left by Aurorans to their four-legged friends continue to raise big questions in the community.

As work continues on restoring Aurora's historic Happy Woodland Pet Cemetery ahead of its eventual opening to the public, the Town continues to grapple with the issue of what to do with a handful of headstones from the 1930s and 40s that contain racially offensive language.

Council, sitting at the Committee level last week, revisited the issue as recommendations to address each of the offending headstones on a case-by-case basis was considered.

In a report drafted by Michelle Johnson, Collections and Exhibitions Coordinator for the Town of Aurora, staff recommended the retention of three of the markers in question in their original positions “supported by enhanced interpretation and educational materials” on site, the removal and storage of two markers that have already been displaced from

their original locations over time, and the retention of “one severely damaged monument in its current location without reconstruction or replication of the original offensive inscription as documented in archival records.”

“During the restoration and research...staff have encountered six instances of racially-offensive language inscribed on historic monuments,” said Johnson in her report, noting that the instances in question are dogs that bore the N-word as a name. “The presence of offensive language at the site does not define its full history, which encompasses multiple narratives, experiences, and periods of significance.”

As part of the process, staff consulted with local school boards on any concerns that might be related to “student exposure to offensive language” during potential field trips. They also consulted with Coconut Village Elevate Consulting, bringing together participants from “local Black and allied communities, which revealed a strong desire to retain the original language.”

“Both expressed significant concern about the presence of racially-

offensive language on monuments and emphasized the potential harm such language poses to student wellbeing,” said Johnson of Board feedback. “Representatives from both Boards indicated that if offensive language remains visible, the Boards would be unlikely to support or permit on-site student field trips to the Happy Woodland Pet Cemetery.... Both Boards emphasized that, under their policies, there is zero tolerance for the repetition or casual exposure to racial slurs, recognizing that even seeing such language can cause harm regardless of intent or context.”

The consultation with the roundtables facilitated by Coconut Village, Johnson notes, involved approximately 50 people from various sectors and “centred on intergenerational perspectives, bringing together the knowledge and historical insight of Black elders, alongside the voices and lived realities of youth and students.”

“The consultant distinguished between a reactive and a transformative approach to addressing racially-offensive content,” said Johnson. “A reactive model focuses on removal or obscuring language as a site-based, cosmetic response, that requires minimal financial or community investment. In contrast, a transformative model is centred on community-led planning and structural change, with the goal of building trust and sustaining long-term inclusion.”

“Consultation participants noted that retaining the historic markers does not negate the pain or discomfort associated with the language, but can create opportunities for reflection and education. While some participants leaned toward removal, they indicated that they would accept either

approach, reflecting an understanding of the complexity of the issue.”

This complexity was reflected in last week's discussions at the Committee of the Whole meeting, which brought out differing views from residents and lawmakers alike.

Historian David Heard, who has been a long-time proponent of the pet cemetery and the value its preservation and designation can bring to the Aurora community said it was important for education “but without the stones in question visible to all members of the public.”

Heard said he spoke to “several” members of the Black community, including a teacher, a coach, a musician, and a mentor and he did not hear “any of them say that leaving it for public view was a good thing.”

“There is a way to educate, I think subtly, without people coming upon it and feeling hurt,” he said.

Some Council members expressed worry that removing or relocating the offending stones would be an attempt to “redefine” the history and context of the site – including Ward 2 Councillor Rachel Gilliland, who proposed that further on-site contextualization be considered.

“Between erasing history, preserving, and the public-facing environment, it's a lot to handle,” she said. “I do really respect the consultation that was done by the participants and I understand they held some nuance and different views, and I recognize the report acknowledges there's really no pathway forward that fully eliminates all this harm, but Council's role, in my opinion, really is to determine which approach creates the least harm, while maintaining that historical integrity and public accessibility.”

“I feel the staff recommendation

Continued on page 20

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## Southlake Run crosses milestone \$520,000 fundraising mark



Contributed photo

BY BROCK WEIR  
EDITOR  
LOCAL JOURNALISM  
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Community participation in the 2026 Nature's Emporium Run for Southlake made it a record-busting spring for supporting local health care.

The numbers have been crunched and this year's fundraiser raised more than \$520,000 for the Southlake Health Foundation, the most the event has raised in its 24-year history.

"We are beyond thrilled with the enthusiasm, the participation, and willingness to fundraising for leading-edge care close to home at this year's Nature's Emporium Run for Southlake," said Jennifer Ritter, President & CEO of Southlake Foundation. "This event continues to be galvanizing for our communities and inspires runners and walkers from across York Region and Simcoe County to lace-up and raise funds for a cause that means so much to us all.

"We often say at Southlake that if you don't have your health, nothing else matters, and that's a message that resonates with so many."

Added Dr. Paul Woods, President & CEO of Southlake Health: "The overwhelming support of our communities show Southlake Health is truly inspiring, and I'm grateful for everyone who walked, ran, and fundraised during this year's event. As Southlake continues to transform care across northern York Region and southern Simcoe County

over the decade ahead, our communities' ability to empower change through their caring support will be vital."

The Nature's Emporium Run for Southlake has its roots in Aurora, first hosted as the Hartwell Challenge, in memory of Councillor and runner Bob Hartwell, who died while running a marathon.

The Hartwell Challenge took place in Aurora for more than a decade, first at the Aurora Community Centre where participants fanned out on routes throughout the neighbouring streets, then at the Stronach Aurora Recreation Complex, where participants took over Wellington Street East. For the last decade, the event has been hosted on Newmarket's Davis Drive, home base for Southlake.

Two decades on, Aurora was well-represented in this year's fundraising stakes, with Aurora Montessori School taking the School Challenge Cup and the Town of Aurora itself securing the Community Spirit Award.

The top municipal fundraiser this year was the Town of Newmarket, taking the Mayor's Challenge from last year's winners in East Gwillimbury.

As the Southlake Run looks ahead to its 25th anniversary, the value the event brings to the community is clear to the title sponsor.

"As a community-based business, we believe the Nature's Emporium Run for Southlake brings our values as a business to life – supporting health, encouraging wellness, and creating space for our community members to show up for one another," said Nature's Emporium CEO Steve Hollingsworth. "It's an absolute honour for Nature's Emporium to partner with Southlake Health Foundation, its volunteers, the participants, and our communities, to support leading edge care close to home through this event. We're so grateful to everyone who gave their time and their generosity to make this year such a success."

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## A Message to the Community from a Former Mayoral Candidate



Phiona Durrant

Aurora is a place I have built my life in for over 19 years. I raised my family here, bought homes, rented homes, built businesses here, and became deeply connected to the rhythm of everyday life in this town. My understanding of Aurora has never come only from council chambers or policy discussions, but from people... from the quiet, human moments that define what community really is.

I have seen that in the simple things: a stranger at the grocery store waving you ahead in line, a cashier trusting you to come back and pay when you've forgotten your wallet, neighbours checking in on one another without being asked. I have also experienced the other side — moments of disrespect meant to diminish. But those moments did not define me, and they did not change how I choose to show up. Because at the end of the day, we all have a choice: to lead with division or to lead with intention.

More recently, I witnessed this town come together in a moment of loss. People stood side by side, offering comfort and choosing compassion over disagreement. It was a reminder that Aurora already knows how to be unified. The question is whether we choose to sustain that, especially when it is not easy.

This is also why I made the intentional decision not to run in this election cycle, even at a time when the opportunity to step into a council seat felt both real and within reach. I believe deeply that voices like mine matter, and that leadership grounded in accountability, compassion, and genuine community connection deserves a place at the table.

But leadership is not only about stepping forward. Sometimes it is about discernment, timing, and understanding where your contribution can create the greatest impact. At this moment, I believe my role is to help strengthen the broader conversation within our community through engagement, advocacy, and meaningful dialogue.

Choosing not to run is not stepping away from leadership. It is stepping into a different form of it; one focused on strengthening the collective, encouraging thoughtful civic participation, and helping elevate the kind of conversations that move communities forward.

That is why I care deeply about what comes next for Aurora.

As someone who ran in the 2022 municipal election, including against the current mayor, I have seen firsthand how perspectives can evolve. Running for office is not rooted in dislike; it is about offering a different vision at a moment in time. And just as leadership should be evaluated, it should also be allowed to grow. Supporting someone today does not erase where you stood yesterday; it reflects what you see now. That requires maturity and a community-centered mindset.

There is a quiet but real danger in adopting the idea that "anyone is better than the current person." When we lower the conversation to replacement alone, we also lower our expectations for leadership itself. We stop asking what truly matters: vision, consistency, integrity, and the ability to unify, and focus instead on reaction. That may feel like action, but it does not always lead to better outcomes.

Endorsements, too, should be rooted in clarity, not comparison alone or dislike. Supporting one person should not require tearing another down. It is entirely possible to recognize that multiple individuals may have good intentions while still believing that one may be better equipped, more prepared, or more aligned with the needs of the moment.

At the same time, we must be careful not to create a culture where people are criticized simply for where they stand, who they support, or what spaces they choose to participate in. In a society that values diversity, inclusion, and freedom of thought, those choices are part of a democratic right. When we begin attacking people for personal or political alignment, we move away from healthy civic engagement and closer toward division, cliques, and performative loyalty.

The challenge before us is not simply to choose leadership, but to elevate how we choose.

And to be clear, whether I endorse someone or not, my voice and principles remain my own. I will continue to hold leadership accountable respectfully, consistently, and without fear or favour. That is part of the values I grew up with as a Jamaican: we speak up when necessary, regardless of title, position, or relationship.

My support is never blind, never silent, and never for sale. Choosing not to endorse someone also does not prevent me from acknowledging growth, effort, or good work where it is deserved. That, too, is part of a healthy democracy.

It is also important to understand that municipalities like Aurora operate within a broader governance structure. Authority is granted by the Province of Ontario through legislation such as the Municipal Act, 2001. This means local government operates within defined limits. It is not fully independent, and it was never designed to be.

With that context, much of the current conversation has focused on mayoral veto power; introduced through the Strong Mayors, Building Homes Act, 2022. Any shift in authority will raise concerns, and it should. But systems evolve. Authority shifts. What matters most is how we respond within those changes.

A veto does not remove council or eliminate collective decision-making. It raises the threshold. And a higher threshold calls for stronger coordination, clearer strategy, and more intentional leadership. Council retains the ability to override, and councilors retain the responsibility to build alignment and engage their communities in meaningful ways. That work does not disappear; it becomes more critical.

From my own lived experience, and the history carried through my ancestors, I have a personal understanding of what it means to navigate systems that present barriers — systems where voices were often absent from decision-making tables, where policies were shaped without our input, and where opportunities, representation, and influence were not equally accessible. We know what it feels like, and we know what it looks like.

That perspective does not dismiss the concerns being raised, but it does shape how I interpret them. Constraint does not mean collapse. It calls for adaptation, advocacy, and deliberate action.

So the question is not simply how veto power is being used. It is how it is being navigated. Are we seeing coordinated efforts? Are councilors building alignment? Are communities being meaningfully engaged? And that engagement should not be confused with a social media call-out.

At the same time, we should be careful not to let frustration around how veto power is being used become a substitute for action. Public office requires more than identifying limitations; it requires working through them. Otherwise, we risk excusing ourselves from the very responsibility the role demands.

Public platforms, including social media, can raise awareness, and that has value. But on their own, they are not a comprehensive strategy for leadership or meaningful civic engagement. Complex policies, governance decisions, and community concerns cannot always be properly addressed through comment sections, quick posts, or reactive online exchanges, where context is often lost and conversations can easily be misunderstood or reduced to soundbites. Real impact comes from sustained engagement, dialogue, organization, and the willingness to connect with communities beyond the screen. Aurora deserves that level of leadership and participation.

History has shown us what is possible when leadership chooses unity over division. Figures like Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu demonstrated that progress is not built on agreement alone, but on the willingness to move forward with intention, accountability, and respect.

Democracy does not require us to agree. It requires us to respect one another's right to differ while remaining committed to the well-being of the community. As we approach another election cycle, we must ask ourselves whether we are choosing leadership based on alignment and vision, or simply reacting to frustration.

Because how we choose matters just as much as who we choose.

Aurora has always been more than politics. It is people, connection, and everyday acts of humanity. If we want to preserve that, then we must be intentional in how we engage, how we lead, and how we participate.

A unified Aurora is possible.

Phiona Durrant, Nuff respect.

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WEEK OF MAY 21 2026

## Local sports heroes Johnston, Thomas, and D'Andrea shine in soccer, hockey, and karate



Alistair Johnston

Photo courtesy of Canada Soccer

BY JIM STEWART

What a week for achievements by local athletes on the soccer pitch,

hockey rink, and karate mat. Aurora-raised international soccer player Alistair Johnston celebrated his team's Scottish Premiership title

on Friday night.

Johnston's Celtics defeated Heart of Midlothian 3-1 to finish first and win the league.

The Glasgow-based Celtics captured the championship for the fifth year in a row and 14th time in 15 seasons. Celtic and its city rival Rangers have won every Scottish national soccer title since 1986.

Interviewed after the climactic victory over Hearts during Sportsnet's Central Sixty, the green-and-white-clad Johnston was awed by teammate Daizen Maeda's dramatic, match-winning goal in the 87th minute: "What in the world was that? It's the greatest league win—it's got to be-- of all-time."

The exultant Johnston, who attended Aurora High School and played for Aurora FC, will represent Canada at the World Cup next month in matches to be played at BMO Field.

Aurora's Robert Thomas is representing red-hot Canada at the IIHF World Championships in Switzerland.

The veteran NHLer, who won the

Stanley Cup with the St. Louis Blues in 2019, has recorded two points in Canada's 5-3 and 6-0 wins over Sweden and Italy, respectively.

It's Thomas's first opportunity to play at the World Championships and he has centred two very productive Team Canada lines during the national team's opening games. Thomas has been tasked by Head Coach Misha Donskov to set up Blues teammate Dylan Holloway and Islanders winger Mathew Barzal. However, the productive centre was matched with wingers Mark Scheifele and Gabe Vilardi versus Team Italy.

Thomas and his swift-skating teammates are looking to end a three-year gold medal drought at the Worlds.

Another local Aurora athlete heading to the world stage and suiting up for Team Canada is Mikaela D'Andrea. The 16-year-old martial artist earned a bronze medal at the Karate Canada Junior National Championships in Edmonton at the Expo Centre in mid-May and will represent Canada at the Worlds.

## Aurora Lawn Bowling Club's Open House and Sport Aurora's All Sport/One Day ready to roll at McMahon Park

BY JIM STEWART  
LOCAL JOURNALISM  
INITIATIVE REPORTER

In addition to lauding the achievements by Johnston, Thomas, and D'Andrea, local residents can look forward to two annual events that warm the cockles of the sporting soul.

On Saturday, May 23, the Aurora Lawn Bowling Club is hosting its Open House commencing at 10 a.m.

The oldest sports organization in Aurora will receive guests from 10 a.m. to 12 noon and demonstrate the techniques of lawn bowling on the greens located at McMahon Park.

Venerable bowlers Ray Noble and Derek Turnbull, along with their hospitable ALBC team, will serve refreshments starting at noon in the clubhouse. All are welcome to bowl with the best, enjoy a Saturday morning on the greens, and take in the rich history and refreshments in the clubhouse.

Another upcoming event being hosted at McMahon Park is Sport

Aurora's Annual All-Sport/One Day on Saturday, June 13 from 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

Registrants between the ages of 6-18 have the opportunity to try eight sports in one day.

Instruction and play at all levels will be provided by qualified Sport Aurora member organizations who want participants to fall in love with their sport.

This year's confirmed morning session features Lawn Bowling led by the Aurora Lawn Bowling Club; Tennis led by the Aurora Community Tennis Club and Total Tennis; and Rugby led by the Aurora Barbarians Rugby Football Club.

This year's confirmed afternoon session features Pickleball led by Elevation Athletics; Soccer led by Rising Stars Soccer Academy; Lacrosse led by Redbirds Lacrosse Club; and Gymnastics led by Kids Super Gym.

To register for the 2026 All-Sport/One Day event, please go to [www.sportaurora.ca](http://www.sportaurora.ca).

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# SAC community raises thousands through Spring Smash event



The St. Andrew's College community hosted its annual SpringSmash event on Thursday, May 14, raising significant funds for Jumpstart Charities. Featuring a full day of sports, school-wide competitions, and more, this year's SpringSmash aimed to raise \$65,000 for the charity, which helps kids overcome financial barriers in accessing sport and recreation opportunities. "Funds raised will support access to sport, equipment, registration fees, and recreation programming for youth, helping remove financial barriers to participation," said the school. "Jumpstart Charities works to give kids across Canada the chance to play and stay active, regardless of their family's financial situation. By supporting programs like these, SpringSmash helps create more opportunities for young people to build confidence, develop teamwork skills, and feel included through sport. This year's event is proudly sponsored by McApline Ford, HQ Wellness, JDL Realty Inc, Mimi's Swim School, and Orange Theory Fitness. The fundraising campaign launched on April 17, 2026, during which students learned about the importance of philanthropy and the real-world impact their efforts can have. Through SpringSmash, students are putting leadership into action while supporting a meaningful cause."

Auroran photos by Glenn Rodger

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# 100+ Men Who Give a Damn benevolent club celebrates 10th anniversary with \$15K donation to Newmarket Food Pantry



Margo, Paul, Erin, Mike, Vanessa and Jim are pictured with the funds raised at the recent meeting.

Auroran photo  
by Glenn Rodger

BY JIM STEWART  
LOCAL JOURNALISM  
INITIATIVE REPORTER

100+ Men Who Give a Damn celebrated their tenth anniversary of community benevolence on Thursday evening at Stonehaven Banquet Hall.

President Mike Smith welcomed more than 150 attendees, including 132 current members, to the society's quarterly gathering.

Three local charities—Newmarket Food Pantry, Peaceful Hearts, and Shine Through the Rain—delivered presentations to the donors.

After listening to the charity reps' pitches, it was decided through a club vote that Newmarket Food Pantry would receive the "lion's share" consisting of a \$15,000 donation.

Peaceful Hearts and Shine Through the Rain received \$1,500 each.

Newmarket Food Pantry representative Erin Cartwright expressed her appreciation towards 100+ Men for the organization's timely monetary support.

"We live in a generous community.

With these funds, we can ensure that our purchasing power for needed items remains strong. It's going to give us funds we need to make sure our shelves are full. We're serving 55 families a day and providing food for over 3,000 individuals weekly. There's been a substantial increase in families who require our assistance."

Cartwright's colleague Vanessa Gorgonio added a poignant statistic to our post-event discussion: "33% of our clients are children."

In her presentation earlier in the evening, Gorgonio noted a recent run on breakfast foods at the Pantry.

"Our needs change on the fly. We recently did a food drive for cereal since our shelves were empty. Cereal's an important start to the day for so many kids. Hunger should never be part of childhood. You're not just making a donation tonight—you're offering stability and hope. Thanks for choosing to care. We're just not fighting hunger—we're building community."

In the Q and A session that followed their succinct presentation, Cartwright

and Gorgonio cited some daunting statistics for the membership assembled at Stonehaven.

"We're serving 977 households and over 2,000 individuals a month. Donations are used to replenish staple items like pasta, rice, beans, and peanut butter. We're running out of these items more often now. We're experiencing a 138% increase in visits to the Pantry since 2020. Our staff of five and our 300 volunteers are very busy stocking shelves and making deliveries."

When asked which kinds of food the Pantry needs the most, Cartwright noted they are in constant need of five groups at the Newmarket hub.

"The first one would be peanut butter; secondly, pasta and meat sauce; third is tuna; fourth is baked beans without pork due to some of our clients' diet restrictions; and we always need coffee. In every donation we receive, we experience the power of community."

Concierge Realty Group's Wasim Jarrah, one of the sponsors of Thursday night's event, echoed Cartwright's

emphatic points.

"By helping the most vulnerable in our communities, we're blessed to be able to help. What we've proven here tonight is that we've created a positive ripple effect by working together."

Working together has been a rallying cry during the organization's ten years of Giving a Damn.

Since 2016, "100+ Men" has donated to 66 local organizations and bestowed a total of \$370,000 to social agencies and registered charities in Newmarket and Aurora.

As part of the 10th anniversary celebrations, a series of videotaped testimonials from community organizations — including Hope House, Rose of Sharon, Deaf/Blind, and Bridge North — were presented to reinforce one of the emergent themes of the evening: "You give where you live."

President Mike Smith, whose company Smith Rogers Financial also sponsored the event, provided a concise "state-of-the-club" address and discussed the growth and good fortunes of the benevolent society.

"We're very lucky. We have businesses in town and money fixes a lot of things. If charities don't have money, they're stuck. For \$401 per year, including only \$1 per member for administration costs, we're able to distribute almost \$75,000 yearly to organizations in need in Aurora and Newmarket. We're up to 185 members and our goal is to get it to "200 Men that Give a Damn" by the end of the month. Our year-to-date donations are record-breaking."

Smith thanked Stonehaven for "donating the banquet hall tonight" and announced the society's next meeting will be held on Thursday, September 16 at the Hungry Brew Hops on Main Street in Newmarket—"where we'll be getting back to our roots."



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# Camps, classes and programs to be showcased at Aurora Recreation Fair

BY BROCK WEIR  
EDITOR  
LOCAL JOURNALISM  
INITIATIVE REPORTER

A bevy of summer camps, programs and classes will be in the spotlight on June 11 as the Town of Aurora hosts its Recreation Fair.

Set for the Stronach Aurora Recreation Complex from 5 – 7 p.m., it will showcase an array of municipal programs designed to keep residents of all ages active and engaged.

“Discover everything Aurora’s Recreation Department has to offer, including a wide range of programs, services, camps, courses, and volunteer opportunities,” says the Town. “Visit departmental kiosks to make in-person inquiries, get instant answers to your recreation questions, and explore how recreation supports wellbeing and builds

a vibrant, healthy community.”

On tap for the fair will be preschool, children’s, youth, and adult registered programs, summer camps, youth drop-in activities, swimming and lessons, Club Aurora Fitness Centre and Group Fitness Classes, career pathways in recreation, Girls Only High School Leadership courses, and accessible sport options.

Recreation specialists will be on hand to answer questions, offer guidance, and give you personalised information “to help you find the right programs for your needs.”

There will also be an opportunity to see if you have what it takes to become a recreation professional in Aurora through the Town’s new Innovation to Innovate program.

“Whether you are a retired language teacher, a martial arts instructor, or have

expertise in any other field – we want to hear from you,” says the Town, noting particular needs for language classes of all ages, martial arts training sessions, creative arts workshops, technology and coding instruction, and health and wellness programs.

Students will have the additional opportunity to learn more about the Town’s Sport Development Internship, a program for university and college

students to assist Aurora’s Sport & Community Development Specialist to get hands-on experience in municipal programming.

“The Recreation Team is looking to connect with community residents,” says the Town. “Come meet our team members to learn more about our Recreation programs and services.”

For more visit [www.aurora.ca/recfair](http://www.aurora.ca/recfair).

## Laughs for Lake Simcoe supports water health through comedy

BY BROCK WEIR  
EDITOR  
LOCAL JOURNALISM  
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Water quality is no laughing matter, but it doesn’t hurt in raising awareness for the Rescue Lake Simcoe Coalition.

This Thursday, May 21, the Coalition will host Laugh for Lake Simcoe, a showcase of Canadian comedy intended to raise funds to support projects protecting and restoring Lake Simcoe and its watershed. Showtime is 7 p.m. at Newmarket’s Old Town Hall.

“Laugh for Lake Simcoe is a great night out for a great cause,” said Bradford-West Gwillimbury Councillor Jonathan Scott, Executive Director of the Rescue Lake Simcoe Coalition. “Every ticket sold helps support practical action and effective advocacy

to keep Lake Simcoe healthy.”

Headlining the event are comedians Mike Wilmot, with Rob Bebenek and Laurie Elliott.

“Plan a night out with your friends, your sweetie, or your co-workers in the historic downtown Newmarket. Get connected to the Rescue Lake Simcoe community and our programs. Bid on a silent auction item, have a drink, and kick back to laugh,” say organizers.

The Rescue Lake Simcoe Coalition is a charitable organization dedicated to protecting and restoring Lake Simcoe through research, education, and advocacy.

For more information about the Laugh for Lake Simcoe event, including tickets, visit [rescuelakesimcoe.org/events/7961](http://rescuelakesimcoe.org/events/7961).

## Plan to interpret racially-insensitive markers at Pet Cemetery raises questions

From page 14

is almost there. It just needs a little bit more clarification. So, that means to me, preserving the architectural documentation, preserving the academic and historical access and ensuring proper contextualization in general. While also considering approaches that reduce unavoidable public exposure, it would be my opinion to include non-prominent treatment, shielding, relocating, partial coverage or options for interpretive access through mechanisms such as QR codes or other kind of archival material. I believe that it would be in the Town’s best interest really to handle these artifacts in a manner that requires intentional engagement with informed consent, rather than making it an unavoidable experience for a general visitor experience.”

Citing feedback from the Heritage Advisory Committee, Ward 3 Councillor Wendy Gaertner also spoke favourably about additional contextualization.

“The Heritage Advisory Committee express comments that the offensive monuments and language remain as is with appropriate disclaimer signage and interpretive learning information provided to indicate that the monuments are product of their respective time, and not reflective of

current values,” she said. “This is a heritage site. I would hope that the school boards would have used this as a learning experience. I hope parents will use this as a learning experience.”

Ward 1 Councillor Ron Weese, on the other hand, was in favour of the stones’ removal.

“This is the public realm and we have to be careful about everybody in our community, not just some people who may be interested in looking at a pet cemetery and come upon these monuments,” he said. “I’m not in favour of these clearly offensive markers to remain in place and not have the cemetery be placed in an emotionally unsafe place for people where it’s not guaranteed. I think we have to do that.”

“I see the recommendations that [are in the report] and I appreciate what Councillor Gilliland is talking about, but I really don’t think we need to have them in full display. I encourage them to be taken by the Museum & Archives. I think they belong in a museum where the context can be understood. When you go to a museum, you’re expected to be emotionally engaged with what is in the museum. Walking in a pet cemetery, to me, doesn’t qualify for that.”

Council will consider the matter further at its May 26 meeting.

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J.E.H. MacDonald (1873–1932), *Forest Wilderness* (detail),  
1921, oil on canvas, 122 x 152 cm, Gift of Colonel R.S.  
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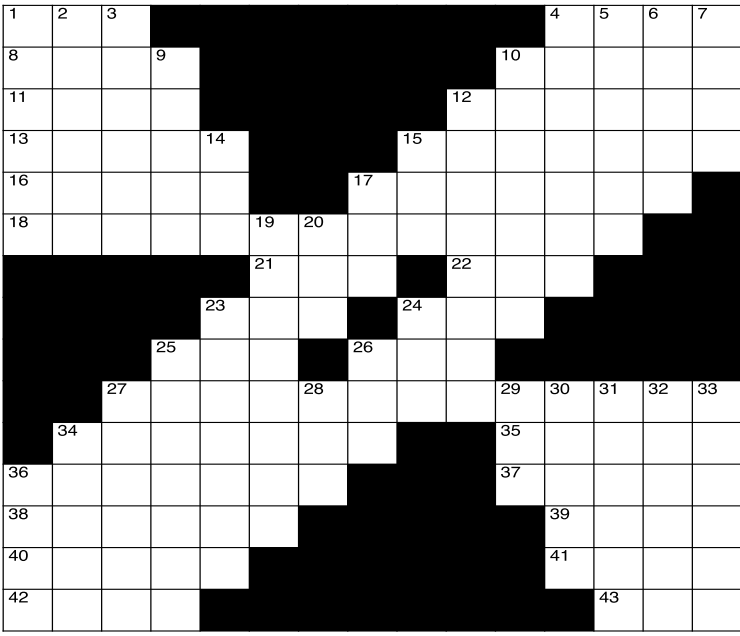
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- 4. The back of a person's neck
- 8. Mild yellow Dutch cheese
- 10. In a less flashy way
- 11. Living room piece
- 12. Shepherd dog
- 13. A citizen of Iran
- 15. Moved slowly
- 16. Small finch
- 17. Previously
- 18. What a kid does on Halloween
- 21. Monetary unit
- 22. Using dry humor
- 23. Ocean

### CLUES DOWN

- 1. Abstain from
- 2. Admirer
- 3. Expedition to observe animals
- 4. Act that is legally void
- 5. WW2 combatants
- 6. A tool
- 7. Looked at
- 9. Showing wild excitement
- 10. Banknotes
- 12. Tired
- 14. Printers need it
- 15. Women's patriotic group
- 17. When you anticipate getting somewhere
- 19. Functions
- 20. Breed of sheep
- 23. Mocking pieces
- 24. A major division of geological time
- 25. Andron
- 26. Many not ands
- 27. Cuban city
- 28. He voiced "Olaf"
- 29. Criticize
- 30. "Thundercats" character
- 31. Markings
- 32. Gets up
- 33. MLB lefty reliever A.J.
- 34. An assembly of witches
- 36. High energy lasers (abbr.)



## THINGS... you ought to know

### SATURDAY, MAY 23

The Aurora Farmers' Market & Artisan Fair takes place today at Town Park from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. Today, the Market hosts its annual Spring Festival.

### SUNDAY, MAY 24

Garden Aurora will host its annual Plant Sale today from 11.30 a.m. to 1.30 p.m. at Aurora Home Hardware. Rain or Shine. This is a cash-only event. All are welcome to attend our community sale which is an annual fundraiser. Our generous members are sharing their beloved plants with the community at extremely reasonable prices. There will be knowledgeable gardeners on hand to help answer questions. Plan to come early as most years we have a line-up of people waiting before we start. Any questions? Please reach out to us through our website [www.gardenaaurora.ca](http://www.gardenaaurora.ca).

### SATURDAY, MAY 30

The Aurora Farmers' Market & Artisan Fair takes place today at Town Park from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m.

### SUNDAY, MAY 31

**AURORA PRIDE FESTIVAL** – Join the Aurora Community Band and Borealis Big Band, in partnership with the Town of Aurora and York Pride, as we celebrate the 2nd Annual Aurora Pride Festival on Sunday, May 31, 2026, from 1 to 5 p.m. at Aurora Town Square. Enjoy an uplifting afternoon of music, connection, and celebration as we come together to honour diversity, inclusion, and community in the heart of Aurora. For more, visit [aurora.ca/whatson](http://aurora.ca/whatson).

### SATURDAY, JUNE 13

The Aurora Performing Arts Festival will take place at Aurora Town Square today from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Come out and see who gets crowned Aurora's 2026 Teen Idol! For more information, visit [www.aurora.ca/recreation-arts-and-culture/specialevents/aurora-performing-arts-festival](http://www.aurora.ca/recreation-arts-and-culture/specialevents/aurora-performing-arts-festival).

### TUESDAY, JUNE 16

Aurora Cares Housing For All presents Thinking Beyond the Market, a film screening, tonight at the

Aurora Town Square Performance Hall. Showtime is 7 p.m. and tickets are \$8.42. Join Dr. Brian Doucet & guests in this full-length documentary film as he travels across Canada to learn about policies, programs and projects that are helping to ensure housing is a human right. Sponsored by Concierge Realty Group. Net proceeds for this event will be donated to the Aurora Food Pantry. For more, visit [aurora.ca/whatson](http://aurora.ca/whatson).

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\*\*\*\*

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

## Fraser throws hat in ring for Ward 3, Moledina in Ward 4

From page 3

hearing in the last while...are traffic and development, and the economic revitalization of the downtown core because there's vacant commercial spots. As a small-business owner, I want to see a strong BIA in Aurora again.

"It's also about increasing local tree planting.... That comes from my land-based background as my education was done through the Indigenous First Nations Technical Institute [because] I feel connected to the land, and that is something really important to me."

At the end of the day, she says it's about ensuring Ward 4 residents "have a strong voice on Council, who is visible, present at all times, with a particular focus on maintaining the ward, and also integrating new Aurora residents in our boundaries."

Moledina is an active member of the community. In addition to her work with Active Minds, she has previously served on Aurora's Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee, and Mayor's Golf Classic Funds Committee. She's also an active member of her children's school community – St. Anne's School for her daughter, and Highview Public School for her son, where, at Highview, she has worked with administration to support lunch programs.

"Aurora is one of the most affluent communities and if our children don't have lunch there's a problem," she says. "I feel we all need to tap into all the resources we have as a community

to take care of the future and our seniors."

"I will be taking Ward 4's voice to the table, and that's why my slogan is, 'Your Councillor, Your Voice,'" she adds. "My personal goal is I'm going to have an open-door policy."

By press time this week, the campaign for Mayor was a three-person race with, in alphabetical order, resident Shawn Deane, incumbent Ward 5 Councillor John Gallo, and incumbent Mayor Tom Mrakas seeking the Town's top job.

It's a two-person race so far in Ward 1 with Lauren Hanna and Rocco Morsillo registered as formal candidates. Incumbent Councillor Ron Weese has not yet made his intentions known.

Ward 3 is also a two-person race with Nikki Alber and Robert James Fraser running for community support. Alber has already received the endorsement of long-time Councillor Wendy Gaertner, who is not seeking re-election after serving on Council since 2003.

Moledina is, so far, the lone official candidate in Ward 4 although incumbent Councillor Michael Thompson has confirmed his intention to seek re-election.

There were, at press time, no confirmed candidates for the campaigns in Ward 2, Ward 5, and Ward 6.

The Municipal Election will take place October 26.

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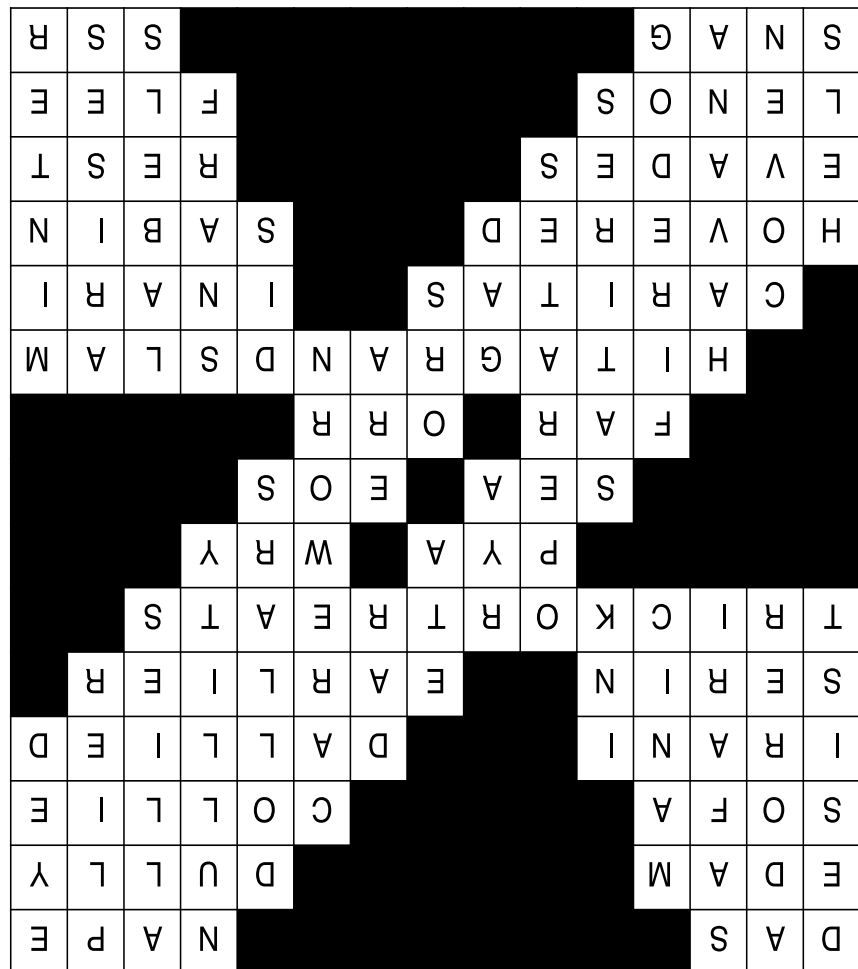
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