

100th anniversary of Cenotaph's construction should be community celebration: Councillor

Aurora's Cenotaph has stood for 98 years as a memorial to the men of Aurora, King Township, and Whitchurch-Stouffville who paid the ultimate sacrifice for King and Country in the First World War.

With the 100th anniversary of the Cenotaph on the horizon in 2025, now is the time to get started on ways to celebrate the landmark's milestone.

Last week, Council signed off on a motion from Ward 2 Councillor Rachel Gilliland to get the ball rolling on collaborating with the all levels of government, the three municipalities, and the local Legion to "commemorate this significant celebration," along with the development of a "collaborative plan of action with possible budget considerations."

"The great thing about Canada is we do continue to stand strong and united in honouring our veterans for all the sacrifices they have made for our freedoms to speak, our freedom to worship, our freedoms to stand for our rights and to oppose what one believes is wrong" and the freedom to choose who should govern our country in the name of democracy," said Councillor Gilliland at the Council table last week. "Built in 1925, which is crazy to think, the Cenotaph is located at the Aurora War Memorial Peace Park and is approaching its 100th year anniversary. This is a significant memorial service location for local soldiers across Aurora, King and Whitchurch-Stouffville. The Cenotaph pre-dates the Canadian National Vimy Memorial in France in 1936 and the National War Memorial of Ottawa of 1939.

"I believe this is an important celebration to share, reflect and collaborate with these municipalities, our Canadian Legion, and other levels of government with a plan of action and possible funding assistance."

Support for the motion was unanimous around the table, with Ward 4 Councillor Michael Thompson asking whether any preliminary conversations had taken place with the Legion in the lead-up to her motion.

"They actually approached me a while ago to have this conversation," said Councillor Gilliland. "I did learn they (the Legion) had been in talks with some of our staff already, but I am looking for a collaboration between us and other municipalities who do share the same location and I think it would be great if we could also get some funding from the other levels of government for this celebration as well. They were very excited about that initiative."

According to a history of the Cenotaph shared by Veterans Affairs Canada and compiled by former Aurora Parks Director Jim Tree, and on behalf of the Aurora Museum and Archives by Terry Macdonald, Major Ian Sweet (Ret'd), and Eric McCartney, the Cenotaph was unveiled and dedicated on October 3, 1925.

"The Scottish Baronial base is 30 feet square and sits on a massive concrete foundation. Height to the top of bronze lantern is 73' 5" and the width across the face above base is 12'. It is an overall tapered square tower form with buttresses at each corner of the base and battlement. The battlement at the top is a little over 6' square. It is made of Stanstead grey granite in heavy blocks with solid concrete fill for 20 feet above foundation, and the central shaft 2-1/2' square from this point reaching to the top. The lantern is of solid bronze, carrying four electric lamps of high wattage and the steps leading up to the memorial are also of granite. The names are engraved in lead.

"At an early age, Sir William Mulock was influenced by the sight of British regiments marching throughout Ontario. Born at Bond Head and raised in Newmarket, this Grand Old Man of Canada was instrumental in the erection of the memorial to those who fell during the First World War. The cost to erect the memorial was \$24,500.00. Sir William contributed \$11,500.00. The balance was raised through general subscription by the people of King, Whitchurch and Aurora. The impressive Aurora War Memorial, including the Altar of Sacrifice, was designed and constructed by the McIntosh Granite Co., Toronto, Canada."

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