

Aurora Museum vision could move forward with new curator plan

By Brock Weir

After spending the first half of the year collecting dust once again, the Aurora Collection could soon receive some extra tender loving care, pending a Council decision this week.

Following indecision around the table and a controversial decision to throw out bids from Cultural Asset Management Group, the Aurora Historical Society, and the Aurora Cultural Centre to curate a museum, Councillors are poised to review a request from Town Staff to hire a curator to bring a museum to life to the tune of roughly \$100,000.

If Council approves this plan, a curator will look after the Aurora Collection, a treasure trove of thousands of local historical artefacts gathered by the Aurora Historical Society for over 40 years before being acquired by the Town last year, would come on the job beginning October 1.

Starting the job with just a few months left in the year, the curator's salary and benefits for the year would come to \$31,850. In 2015, for a full year's work, this would increase to \$111,875, and to \$116,350 by 2016.

"The needs of the Aurora Collection are immediate and should be addressed as soon as possible," says Al Downey, Director of Parks and Recreation, in his report to Council this week, noting that the salary in future years would be part of his department's operating budget. "The full-time position will ensure that this process commences immediately and that the exhibition of the collection can be realised in 2015, while working on many other initiatives to help preserve, store, and provide educational opportunities on the history of Aurora.

"As reported by Cultural Asset Management Group (CAM), the Collection requires attention to storage and evaluation, as well as accessioning and de-accessioning of the Collection. This position will also be required to respond to numerous outstanding requests for archival information. Attention will also be focused on the preparation for display of the Collection. Staff anticipates our first display in the spring of 2015."

This past spring, staff presented a recommendation to Council to take on CAM as the curator of the Aurora Collection. This move took many sitting around the table by surprise, they said, with some questioning whether a more "local outfit" such as the Historical Society or Cultural Centre might have been a better choice.

This was a view CAM took exception to, citing their own ties to the local community, as well as their extensive work evaluating and appraising the collection, as well as curating an exhibition of collection items to mark Aurora's Sesquicentennial.

After being tasked by Council to come up with terms of reference for a curator they would hire themselves to maintain the collection, that too is being brought forward this week. Among a curator's duties will be to perform day-to-day administrative functions related to the collection, develop educational programs for local schools, as well as new forms of revenues such as grant writing, and help administer the recently approved Cultural Master Plan for the Town of Aurora.

As for the Aurora Historical Society, it is currently without a curator of its own, following the departure of long-time curator-manager Catherine Richards for a similar position with the City of Oshawa.