

Cenotaph's 100th anniversary could be celebrated with exhibitions, site improvements



The Aurora Cenotaph is one of the Town's most iconic landmarks and ahead of the 100th anniversary of its dedication to the men who paid the ultimate sacrifice for King & Country in the First World War, plans are underway to make it a milestone to Remember.

The Cenotaph, which lies at the heart of the Aurora War Memorial Peace Park, serves as a memorial to soldiers and servicemen hailing from Aurora, King Township and Whitchurch-Stouffville and plans for the milestone anniversary include collaborations from all three municipalities.

While a final budget for the celebrations is yet to be presented, initiatives that are part and parcel of the anniversary could include site work to install permanent seating at the space, correct some century-old typos on the monument, a street banner program, exhibitions outdoor, virtual and travelling, and the installation of a monument for Indigenous soldiers.

“A special ceremony will take place to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Aurora War Memorial,” said Michelle Johnson, Collections and Exhibitions Coordinator for the Aurora Museum & Archives, in a report to Council. “The Aurora Legion will lead this ceremony and it will include a rededication of the restored monument, speakers, and a selection of traditional music and readings. Staff will endeavour to connect with descendants of individuals who were responsible for organizing, fundraising, and advocating for the construction of the Aurora War Memorial in 1925.

“For 100 years, Aurora War Memorial Peace Park has been identified as the place community members go to memorialize those who have been lost to armed conflict. Missing from the landscape is a memorial dedicated to Indigenous community members who have lost their lives in conflict since the beginning of European settlement. A new memorial dedicated to Indigenous people who have made the ultimate sacrifice is being considered as part of this project.”

Additional site work is slated to include renovating and levelling existing pathways, the addition of four memorial benches, correcting the misspelled last name and removing an “incorrect medal attribution,” preventative conservation and restoration, additional lighting to illuminate the LAV, which was installed to pay tribute to those who served in Afghanistan, and the Korean War memorial installed last year.

It is hoped that all three municipalities will collaborate on the exhibition to be developed, said Johnson.

“Aurora, King, and Stouffville have a unique relationship that transcends municipal borders,” she said. “A series of outdoor, virtual,

and travelling exhibitions will explore that relationship by focusing on how the three municipalities came together to share in memorializing those who made the ultimate sacrifice during the First World War. Content from all three municipal collections will be showcased to help tell the story of how the Aurora War Memorial, and surrounding Peace Park, came to be.

The Town will recruit contract staff to assist with exhibition research, development, installation, and other parts of the project, as needed. The outdoor exhibition will be located in Aurora War Memorial Peace Park and will be on view from August to November 2025. A virtual exhibition will be launched on the anniversary of the memorial dedication. Finally, a travelling exhibition will be developed for display in Stouffville, King, and other possible locations.

The proposed street banner program will feature soldiers from the First World War featured in their respective municipalities as well, she added.

Banners will fall into two categories: the first includes information about the 100th anniversary of the Aurora War Memorial, the second category will feature individual soldiers whose names are included on the Aurora War Memorial, she said. The design of the banners will be standardized, and each municipality will highlight individuals local to their area who made the ultimate sacrifice during the First World War. After the project, the soldier banners will be given to the Aurora Legion for their use.

The plans were greeted warmly by Council at the Committee level on May 7 with Ward 3 Councillor Wendy Gaertner praising the new lighting proposed.

Definitely I think the Korean War Memorial should be lit and also the memorial to the Aboriginal war veterans, she said. That's very important.

Ward 2 Councillor Rachel Gilliland was also positive about the plan, but sought assurances that Whitchurch-Stouffville and King would be collaborating and chipping in as well as potential grant funding from other levels of government.

We have consulted with King Township and Whitchurch-Stouffville. There are no budget commitments at present, said Johnson. They are waiting to better understand what Council is prepared to endorse at this time. There are some areas that for them are more appropriate to support in times of budgetary commitments. Some of those areas are exhibitions, a banner program, not necessarily the site works that the Aurora War Memorial Peace Park for a few reasons that are more relevant to their budgetary mandates.

Responding to budgetary questions from Ward 1 Councillor Ron Weese, Johnson added the exhibition budget line is a three-pronged approach.

It includes an online exhibition in which we would target Virtual Museums of Canada Community Memories funding, she said. That is a grant that is up to 50 per cent. It also includes an on-site exhibition at Aurora War Memorial Peace Park that would be temporary for about three months and would include signage throughout the park that would have reproductions of archival materials, stories related to the establishment of the memorial, and then a travelling exhibition component. That's three mediums for the exhibition. The travelling exhibition component is also eligible for grant funding and there is appetite to bring that to our partner municipalities in King and Stouffville.

The estimated budget for the 100th anniversary project stands at \$144,000 -- \$53,500 for site works and enhancements; \$38,000 for the exhibitions; \$12,000 for contract staff; \$12,500 for street banners; \$25,000 for the new Indigenous memorial; and \$3,000 for the ceremony itself.

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