

Construction of new Williams high school gets \$65 million from Province



Hayden Gilchrist is beginning his school year this week much as he did last year, walking the hallowed halls of Dr. G.W. Williams Secondary School.

In a few years, however, the start of his Grade 12 year will be very different.

He and his classmates will be part of the first graduating class of the new Dr. G.W. Williams Secondary School, now being constructed on Spring Farm Road at Bayview Avenue.

Set to open in 2026, the new school will replace the current Williams building on Dunning Avenue.

On Thursday, Hayden was among the community members present as MPP Dawn Gallagher Murphy, on behalf of the Province of Ontario, announced the construction tender of \$67.5 million to bring the build to completion.

Once the doors are open, the new Williams building will offer 1,212 secondary school spaces for local families in Aurora's fastest-growing quadrant.

"I am proud to announce the new replacement school for Dr. G.W. Williams right here at 11 Spring Farm Road, closer to most of the emerging residential development which is occurring right here in the northeastern corner of Aurora," said Gallagher Murphy on site last week, joined by Mayor Tom Mrakas and officials from the York Region District School Board.

"I am happy to announce our government has provided the York Region District School Board (YRDSB) with the approval to award the tender for the construction of the new replacement school that will allow the Board, as we can see, to get shovels in the ground. This announcement is supported by an investment of \$67.5 million; this includes \$2.4 million from the Town of Aurora for an [artificial turf] field to be used jointly by the school and the community."

By relocating the school to the Spring Farm location, it will bring the high school into an area that includes five elementary schools, giving families in the neighbourhood the chance to walk to school, rather than take the bus across Town.

"This will reduce costs for families no longer requiring the use of public transit to get to school," the MPP continued.

The move was hailed by Ron Lynn, Chair of the YRDSB, who said the building of the new school "helps the Board to better build [for] the needs of York Region's growing communities."

Today's announcement, including the funding of a replacement Dr. G.W. Williams Secondary School, is exciting news for the students and families of Aurora, he said. This funding will truly ensure that Aurora students continue to receive high quality educational programming in a modern and welcoming learning environment. On behalf of the YRDSB, I would like to express our thanks and appreciation for this investment from the Provincial government and the future of York Region students and families.

Speaking on behalf of the Town, Mayor Mrakas shared some of Williams' storied history, from its beginnings as Aurora High School in 1888 on Wells Street to its 1952 move to Dunning Avenue, and the school's 1961 rebrand in honour of Dr. Williams, a medical doctor, who served as a trustee of the local school board for nearly 50 years.

While for decades the school successfully served Aurora and produced so many incredible alumni, it became increasingly clear in recent years there was a growing need to relocate the school to better serve families on the east side of our Town, said Mayor Mrakas. I want to thank the parents and families who advocated very strongly for the school to be relocated, as well as the school board and the Ontario Government for working together to find a solution that worked for our community. Aurora is growing and responding to the needs of residents, especially our young people, and it is so important that we do so. The development of the new Dr. G.W. Williams secondary school is a great example of community working together with various orders of government to get things done.

These were indeed the sentiments shared by neighbourhood families who gathered on-site for Thursday's announcement.

It will mean a lot, says Amanda Gilchrist, Hayden's mom, of the school relocating closer to home. Hayden won't have to rely on bus times, being on a busy public transit bus. He'll be able to go home for lunch if he wants to and, frankly, eat better because he won't be eating out as much or doesn't have to pack a lunch in the morning if he doesn't feel like it. He can hang out after school with his friends and not worry about getting on a bus to make it all the way home because if he misses that bus he has no ride home.

Hayden agreed, noting: Being able to walk here will be great. Last year, I was having to rush for the bus because it left 10 minutes after school ended, so I couldn't talk to anyone; it was just, Sorry, goodbye, I have to go.

I think just the freedom of having a school so close to him is going to be huge, Amanda continued. To extra-curriculars, he's able to go home on his own and we won't have to leave work early and pick him up because there is no public transit after those 3 p.m. buses.

By Brock Weir
Editor Local Journalism Initiative Reporter