

Feds should put up money for National Historic Site: Council

By Brock Weir

Last fall, the new Federal Government promised 'sunny ways' and now Council is looking for the Federal sun to shine down on Hillary House with an infusion of public money.

Council approved a notice from Councillor Jeff Thom last week calling on Mayor Geoff Dawe to write a letter lobbying Melanie Joly, Minister of Canadian Heritage, to earmark federal funding for infrastructure upgrades to Hillary House and the Koffler Museum of Medicine, the Town's only National Historic Site, and extending that net to include Aurora's two Members of Parliament - Newmarket-Aurora MP Kyle Peterson and Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill MP Leona Alleslev.

'Hillary House is recognized by the National Historic Sites and Monuments Board as one of Canada's best examples of Gothic Revival Architecture,' said Councillor Thom in his notice of motion. 'Hillary House is a leading example of a heritage house museum in Canada, which combines architectural significance and the historic possessions of the many generations of medical doctors who worked and lived there [but] is in need of significant infrastructure upgrades in order to pass on this irreplaceable piece of Aurora's heritage to future generations of Canadians.'

Hillary House National Historic Site is currently owned by the Aurora Historical Society (AHS). AHS member John Greene was on hand to hear Council's decision on the motion, where it received widespread support.

'Hillary House is something we all treasure in Town, it is a real gemstone in the community, and I think everyone at Council recognizes this,' said Councillor Thom at last week's meeting. '[The motion] recognizes [that we] as Councillors have a responsibility to lobby members of higher levels of government [and] personally putting it in the public sphere is so important. It gets the issue talked about within the community and it can also spur some action that we can tackle on two fronts.'

'The current Federal Government, during the election, ran on what they called 'social infrastructure' and they would be providing funding for such initiatives. They did not provide a hell of a lot of specifics on that, but they did provide to us an indication they would be providing in their budgets, moving forward, funding on social infrastructure. I believe this is in the wheelhouse of social infrastructure and it is certainly an important part of our community.'

All avenues, he added, should be exhausted to get funding and a 'finely worded letter' might do the trick, he added. While Mayor Dawe said he was 'more than happy to write the letter', he cautioned the Councillor that this wasn't breaking new ground.

'I will try to be as eloquent as possible, but I did this a few times last year with the Member of Parliament at that time, as did Councillor Abel, but we didn't get anywhere,' said Mayor Dawe, to which Councillor Thom pointed out that this is a new government. 'That's true. We now have two members representing us.'

Whether or not that means that following last year's Federal Election has doubled Hillary House's chances of getting some Federal dollars, Council appears to hope so.

Councillor Paul Pirri, a representative on the Board of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, suggesting a collaboration with Councillor Thom on a further notion to push for a 'bigger scope' from that perspective.

'I know in the past, Federal funding has been a challenge [for Hillary House],' added Councillor Michael Thompson. 'Anything we can do to support their efforts and try to help them, be it for infrastructure funding or ongoing funding through Parks Canada, I am happy to support.'

'You go to Gravenhurst and you go to Bethune House and it is supported by the Federal Government, then you come to Hillary House and you see some of the challenges they have, they certainly are well deserved. Hopefully with a little bit of pressure and

letter writing, it will make a difference.?