

## Milestone anniversary of R.A.I.L.'s arrival in Aurora on track for community celebration

Canada is a nation built on the foundations of a railway and, as a community, so is Aurora.

As the country looks forward to its 160th birthday next year, the Aurora community may have a milestone of its own to celebrate in 2028 as historians and community groups come together to mark the 175th anniversary of the first train arriving in Town.

Plans for a 2028 observance dubbed R.A.I.L., an acronym still being kept under wraps is the brainchild of local historian David Heard.

Heard first raised the possibility of a community-wide, month-long celebration in the spring of 2028 at a recent Council meeting, and a subsequent motion from Ward 5 Councillor John Gallo, approved by Council, has got the ball rolling.

The arrival of the rail service from Toronto to Aurora in 1853 was a defining moment in the Town's history, contributing significantly to its economic development, population growth, and long-term prosperity, said Councillor Gallo in his motion. 2028 will mark the 175th anniversary of this historic milestone, presenting a unique opportunity to celebrate Aurora's heritage and educate residents and visitors about the Town's railway history.

Noting the idea was first brought forward by Heard, the motion added organizations such as the Aurora Historical Society have a strong track record supporting local heritage through programming, exhibitions and community engagement.

The Town of Aurora has previously delivered successful commemorative initiatives, such as the 100th anniversary of the War Memorial, through a coordinated model led by the Museum in collaboration with community partners and stakeholders, he continued. Staff have indicated that the museum team is already in discussions with neighbouring municipalities and partners regarding this milestone and the Town's Special Events team may play a supporting role.

The motion, as endorsed by Council, has tasked municipal staff with developing a coordinated plan for the R.A.I.L. 175 program, and identifies the Town's Museum and Cultural Services initiative to join Heard at the table in making it a reality, alongside the Society, municipalities that might be sharing this milestone anniversary, and other community partners.

Should everything go to plan, municipal staff are expected to report back on detailed plans by the end of the second quarter of 2027.

For many years, maybe since childhood, I envisioned R.A.I.L., said Heard, making his pitch to Council. From an Eaton's catalogue wishing for a train set to counting freight cars here as a child in the 1960s, I always wanted my own train. I think we all did so, how do we transfer that passion into four weeks of a wonderful train celebration?

The vision is a series of events from mid-May to mid-June 2028 which Heard said has significant potential to bring the community together.

He pitched a potential budget of \$250,000 shared between community partners, stakeholders, fundraising and grants, adding that having the Aurora Historical Society on board with the plan is vital for their fund-raising and grant-writing ability.

The budget is based in these early stages [on] four events, four weeks, he said. Could we turn a profit? I'm very proud to say that I've talked to some staff and they do believe in this project, that maybe we could actually make some revenue out of it. I believe we can.

I'm not going to tell you what the [R.A.I.L.] acronym is, we're actually planning a little contest to see if people can figure out what it is, but it tells Aurora's story and it's pretty powerful.

By Brock Weir Editor Local Journalism Initiative Reporter