

## Petch House is camera-ready as Town's newest wedding venue

Couples looking to hold a civil wedding in Aurora often saw Council Chambers decked out in its matrimonial best to play backdrop to the most significant day in their lives ? but there's a ?new? heritage option now available in the form of Petch House.

The Town of Aurora recently completed renovations on Petch House, a log cabin standing just behind the Aurora Seniors' Centre, at the John West Entrance to the Aurora Arboretum. The house is Aurora's oldest-surviving residence.

Once located in the northeast quadrant of Wellington Street East and Leslie Street, the building sat mouldering on various locations for decades after being displaced by construction before the Town of Aurora purchased the building and worked to restore it log by log before it found its new foundations behind the Seniors' Centre.

Since then, it has served various purposes, including as storage, a filming location, and a place for Easter Bunny, Santa Claus and even some of his reindeer to hold court at various seasonal events hosted by the Town, but it took many years for a permanent use to be found.

Little more than a year after Council approved a \$50,000 renovation plan, funded by the Town's Heritage Reserve Fund, its completion was announced by Mayor Mrakas last week.

?The Petch House has sat mostly empty since it was restored in 2013 ? used mainly for storage. But that has all changed,? he said. ?Renovations are now complete and starting this July, the Petch House can officially be booked as a wedding chapel.

?The work was completed with guidance from the Heritage Advisory Committee to ensure the building's historic charm was preserved. A commemorative plaque will soon share the story of this remarkable piece of Aurora's past ? and every wedding booking will include a keepsake copy of its history.

?For far too long, this beautiful space sat underused. Now, it will become part of some of our residents' most cherished memories ? just as I envisioned when I brought forward the motion to have it used as a wedding chapel. Another great example of how we're preserving the past while building for the future.?

Council's approved funding from the Heritage Reserve covered basic improvements to the structure to fit the purposes, including additional lighting, accessibility improvements, a security system, and upgraded floors. Their decision to proceed in this direction, however, came after the Town's Heritage Advisory Committee was ?split? over its future, including whether it would be embraced as such a venue, as well as uncertainty over the Town's future Development Charge revenues.

?Petch House is a desirable location for small weddings due to its central location to Town Hall, local restaurants, highway access points and natural green space for wedding photos,? said Robin McDougall, Aurora's Director of Community Services, in a report to Council in the spring of 2024, when lawmakers approved the final funding. ?Guests would check in at Town Hall with Access Aurora and the delegated wedding officiant would accompany the wedding party to the Petch House to conduct the service. Petch House would also be well-used for pictures along [the Aurora Community Arboretum].

?Based on the short duration of each civil ceremony (less than 30 minutes per service) it would be staff's recommendation to proceed with minimal improvements to the Petch House. Further additional enhancements could be considered if demand for civil ceremonies continues to rise; however, for the current expected use, a minimal level of work is needed to make this space a functioning wedding chapel that is marketable for the current trends in the wedding service industry ? rustic, private/intimate, wedding-ready with no additional cost of rentals for couples looking for a small space.?

**By Brock Weir**