

Residents call for answers on Curator's departure

Residents want answers on the departure of Shawna White from her position of curator of the Aurora Museum and Archives.

As The Auroran reported last week, Ms. White, who had led the museum since its re-establishment in 2015, was no longer with the Town as of June 23, despite several ongoing projects being carried out by the Museum and its staff.

?I can confirm that Shawna is no longer with the Town of Aurora,? said Municipal CAO Doug Nadorozny on Friday. ?As this is a personnel matter, I am sure you can appreciate that it would not be appropriate for me to disclose any details.?

Ms. White declined to speak on her departure other than a brief statement to the paper.

?I am sad most of all to be leaving the wonderful people of Aurora who put their trust in me to share their stories and document their history.?

But for many people in the community who worked with the Aurora Museum & Archives on projects ranging from Reconciliation to Black History, these brief statements were not enough.

A petition at Change.org has been launched by Shruti Kalyanaraman and Phiona Durrant, both members of the Aurora Black Community Facebook group. Both women worked with Ms. White on several community initiatives, including highly successful virtual programming for Black History Month as well as an Every Child Matters demonstration of solidarity held last month at Town Park following the discovery of the remains of 215 Indigenous children in unmarked graves at the former Kamloops Residential School.

While they say they know the petition won't bring Ms. White back to the museum, they are calling for an apology from staff and a recognition from Council of the work she provided the community.

?Shawna's work for the Town included supporting social justice and equality through information and archiving,? they say, noting she has been a ?great ally? for people of colour and marginalized families across Aurora.

?Beverly Daniel says, ?We all have a sphere of influence. Each of us needs to find our own sources of courage so we can begin to speak.? Shawna White was that sphere of influence who welcomed all stories, all voices to bridge cultures in Aurora with the Indigenous community, the Aurora Black Community, and all other diverse groups.?

Ms. White, they say, ?restored hope in our community during this cry against racism and racial injustice.?

Speaking to The Auroran following the launch of the petition, Ms. Durrant spoke of the impact Ms. White has had on her personally as well as to the Aurora Black Community.

?It was everything,? says Ms. Durrant of Ms. White stepping in to help organize a series of programs in time for Black History Month in February, building a celebration from the ground up and in very little time. ?When I saw how impactful those sixteen programs we put on for the community, right now there are people building on what we already did. We have people building groups and working together now, collaborating just because Black History Month was done and brought these people together who've never met each other before. There's a lot happening.?

?[Her departure] felt too close to home for me even though I don't know Shawna so much other than the work we do. She was always, ?What can we do from the Town perspective? I couldn't even tell you how I feel. I can't find words enough to explain who Shawna is. She did not just say ?yes? to make you feel comfortable. She wants everybody to be represented and heard.?

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter