

Town, Society ink "historic" deal on collections



(Suzanne Reiner, president of the Aurora Historical Society, signed the transfer agreement with Mayor Geoffrey Dawe at Town Hall on Wednesday afternoon. Auroran Photo by Brock Weir.)

By Brock Weir

The drive to re-establish a permanent museum in the Town of Aurora took a "huge step forward" this week.

Mayor Geoffrey Dawe and Aurora Historical Society (AHS) president Suzanne Reiner signed an agreement Wednesday afternoon transferring ownership of the thousands of artefacts donated and otherwise acquired by the AHS to the Town of Aurora.

Council authorized the transfer of the Aurora Collection this spring, while questions remained on how exactly the artefacts would be managed.

Last month, Council supported looking to third parties to maintain and manage the collection on behalf of the Town. Although this move caught the AHS off guard as something they hadn't anticipated coming forward, they ultimately opted to move ahead.

"Council wanted to tackle the transfer and not have to deal with the management [at this point] so we said we would separate the two and deal with the management later," said Ms. Reiner. "This is a good starting point for the Town, for Parks and Recreation, or whoever is going to be looking at it.

"The time has come for AHS. We have been stewards of the Aurora Collection for 50 years and we have been challenged financially for years. We see other municipalities that started out with their respective local historical society owning the collection and then it eventually went through to municipal ownership and we see that this needs to be done. If we want an Aurora museum to grow and to be sustained, this is the first step in the right direction."

For Ms. Reiner and the AHS, it is not a matter of who ultimately owns the Aurora collection, but who can best see it through over and beyond the next five decades. They believe having the collection under municipal ownership will ensure the future of the collection.

"The Town will allocate resources so they are in a better position to expand and have the museum become a very important heritage site," she added "If it is in our hands, we are limited to what we can do financially with the Aurora museum.

"[With the option of looking for a third party to manage it] I can understand what they are trying to do, but at least the Town will own it. We feel comfortable that they will be good stewards and us, as the public, will demand it."

Since the July Council meeting, the AHS and Town Staff have been working to get everything in order for this week's transfer, including compiling the over 16,000 artefacts into a comprehensive 500 page inventory so the Town knows what they are going to get. According to the Town, the collection of artefacts, textiles, photos and documents has been appraised up to \$200,000.

?The management agreement may or may not proceed, depending on what model Council chooses to go with for the exhibition and care of the collection,? said Aurora CAO Neil Garbe on the options previously available to Council, including hiring new staff and curators to look after the collection and keep it accessible to the public. ?If a third party takes care of it, then the agreement is between the Town as the owner of the collection and that third party.

?This is a huge step forward. The Aurora Historical Society has done a great job until now, but I think for what the community wants in terms of the collection being on display and used throughout the community, I think moving it to Town ownership is a critical step in?getting it into the public where it should be.?