

## Dignitaries, community members mark Emancipation Day at Town Hall



Representatives from all levels of government joined citizens at large at Town Hall on August 1 to mark Emancipation Day.

The third such event in Aurora, and the second in-person commemoration organized by the Aurora Black Caucus, the day marks the anniversary of the Slavery Abolition Act, signed by William IV in 1834 abolishing slavery throughout the British Empire.

Once again, Emancipation Day was the subject of a special proclamation issued by Mayor Tom Mrakas, a document which noted the day as "an opportunity to acknowledge the legacy of the history of slavery in Canada while celebrating the rich contributions that people of African descent have made to our Town and country."

"By recognizing Emancipation Day on August 1, the Town acknowledges an unforgiving period within our history and the importance of our ongoing commitment to eliminate discrimination in all its forms. Residents of the Town of Aurora are working hard to establish a caring and compassionate community in which all its members, regardless of race or ethnic origin, have the right to live in conditions of good health, safety, dignity, respect and peace."

Speaking at the podium, the Mayor said many Canadians are "not aware of the history of the enslavement of Black people" in today's Canada and Ontario.

"On this day, we acknowledge this dark chapter in our history and celebrate the perseverance of those who fought for their freedom, while also recognizing that we still have a lot more work to do to end anti-Black racism in Canada," he said. "Today, we reaffirm our commitment to working together to create a fair and just society, where everyone has the opportunity to succeed and thrive. On this day, we acknowledge the significant and lasting contributions that Black Canadians have and continue to make to our country, including here in Aurora, a Town that celebrates our differences and sees diversity as an asset."

But the Emancipation Day commemoration goes beyond just the Black community, according to Caucus Chair Milton Hart.

"We look at people from the LGBT community, we look at people from First Nations communities, we look at people all the way to every cross-section of Canada and it really transcends race," says Hart. "This movement that is being spearheaded by the Aurora Black Caucus? yes, we're commemorating the end of slavery, which is a wonderful thing, but we're also saying this liberation did not take place because of the efforts of Black people only; it was an all-hands-on-deck approach."

"We're trying to galvanize everyone within Aurora to look at these different communities, look at the LGBT community, look at the First Nations community, look at so many communities around us that are feeling alienated or even targeted at this point. If you're feeling targeted then you're not totally liberated. The message to our leaders is we're going to keep beating this drum?. We're encouraging everyone to get on, for lack of a better term, this movement of emancipation because nobody is free until everybody is

free and people cannot feel free if they are feeling marginalized.?

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter