

Heritage property owners could get support from the Town

Owners of heritage properties throughout Aurora could soon be able to call on the Town for a helping hand.

Council last week voted to get the ball rolling on a new Heritage Grant Program for property owners.

Proposed by Mayor Tom Mrakas, the motion called for municipal staff to create just such a program aimed at "providing financial assistance" for owners to preserve and restore designated properties in consultation with the Town's Heritage Advisory Committee (HAC).

HAC's input, the Mayor noted in his motion, could range from the development of guidelines and criteria to determine eligibility for properties and projects, application procedures, and grant disbursements.

That, he said, would "ensure transparency and fairness in the allocation of funds."

"Preserving and promoting our Town's heritage is of paramount importance to the community," said Mayor Mrakas in his motion. "There is a recognized need to support property owners in maintaining and restoring heritage buildings and sites. A Heritage Grant Program would provide financial assistance to property owners for the preservation and restoration of heritage properties.

"Such a program would contribute to the overall preservation and enhancement of our Town's historical character and cultural identity."

The motion was passed on consent and any future plan devised by staff will be up for further Council review before final approval.

A new grant program will not be ready for some time, but the benefits of it could come into focus at Council this week as the Aurora Historical Society seeks municipal support for the preservation and maintenance of Hillary House National Historic Site.

Council will consider a report stemming from Aurora Historical Society co-presidents Alan Lambert and former Aurora mayor Geoff Dawe.

The letter said the AHS Board had unanimously voted to call on the Town to "enter into discussions with the Town of Aurora to explore options with respect to ensuring the long-term sustainability of Hillary House and to report back to the (AHS) membership."

"As a result of receiving the letter, staff set up a meeting with the co-presidents to consider how best to proceed with their request," said Robin McDougall, Director of Community Services, in a report to this week's Committee of the Whole meeting. "It was during those discussions that staff recommended that representatives from AHS present their request to Council for consideration. Assuming Council is interested in exploring options, the recommendations in this report will help establish next steps.

"Depending upon the outcome of the sustainability plan and the Town's participation in that plan, it may result in both capital and operating financial implications of which the Town has not considered as part of its existing multi-year budgets. These financial implications will become clearer upon the conclusion of the Town's consultations with Hillary House's stakeholders."

By Brock Weir