

SPECIAL MEMBERS' MEETING

Monday, June 9, 2025 at 7:00 pm
Meeting held at Hillary House NHS
and Virtually via Zoom
MINUTES

Present

BOARD OF

DIRECTORS: Geoffrey Dawe – Co-Chair, Alan Lambert – Co-Chair, Dan McGeown – Treasurer, John Green – Secretary, Michelle Primeau, Angela Trevivian, Timothy McCutcheon.

STAFF: Kathleen Vahey - Curator/Manager, Julie Preston – Administrative Assistant.

MEMBERS: John Bare, Marjorie Bare, Wendy Browne, Len Bulmer, Laureen Campbell, Judy Dickens, Susan Hanna, Mary Beth Hess, Richard Hess, Yves Larouche, Renee LeBlanc, Donna Lewis, Eric McCartney, John McIntyre, Jai Nargas, Faye Neal, Kathryn O'Dwyer, Layla Pasdernick, Helen Roberts, Jacqueline E Stuart, Christine Valenini, Patricia Wallace, Martin Watson, Cllr. Ron Weese, Molly Wills.

SUPPORTERS: Kate Brewitt, Christina Cannavicci.

1. CALLED TO ORDER: 7:07 p.m.

Co-President Geoffrey Dawe welcomed everyone to the Special Members' Meeting and called it to order.

2. CONFIRMATION OF QUORUM

Geoffrey Dawe and Kathleen Vahey confirmed quorum.

3. MEETING PROCEDURE

Geoffrey Dawe outlined meeting procedure for in-person and virtual meeting.

4. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

MOTION

THAT the Agenda be approved. Moved by: Michelle Primeau. Seconded by: Dan McGeown. **CARRIED.**

5. DECLARATION OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST – None.

6. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

a) Background on Discussions with the Town of Aurora

As outlined in the document “2. AHS_Background on Discussions with Town” and “3. AHS Submission to the Town of Aurora_Feb 02-25” that was sent out to the AHS membership ahead of the meeting:

- The AHS Board of Directors have been in discussion about the future of Hillary House with the Town of Aurora since 2022.
- Throughout 2023, the Board met with Town staff numerous times and collaborated to have an Enhanced Condition Assessment completed to better understand the restoration needs of Hillary House.
- Based on a review of the Enhanced Condition Assessment and in consideration of the AHS' current financial situation, it became clear to the Board that the obligations of maintaining/preserving Hillary House were exceeding the AHS' ability to raise the necessary funds required to meet those obligations.
- The Board called a Special Members' Meeting in February 2024. The result of that meeting was a Motion, duly moved, seconded and carried, that authorized the Board of Directors to enter into formal discussions with the Town of Aurora to see what options for the future sustainability of Hillary House would be available.

- Over 2024, the Board worked with Town staff to create a public engagement survey and, at the Town's request, hosted two (2) groups of visitors who had expressed interest in the potential commercial uses of Hillary House.
- The survey results were presented to Council during the Committee of the Whole Meeting on December 2, 2024 in a report by Robin McDougall, Director of Community Services. Co-Chair Geoffrey Dawe delegated at that meeting in support of Director McDougall's report. The initial results from the survey showed 89% of the respondents supported the option of the Town acquiring and maintaining Hillary House as an operating museum. Council then requested that Director McDougall remove non-resident results from the survey. The revised analysis showed that 87% of local respondents supported the option of the Town acquiring and maintaining Hillary House as an operating museum
- In early 2025, the Board submitted a final report recommending full assumption by the Town of Aurora of the assets and effective operations of the Aurora Historical Society/ Hillary House National Historic Site.

b) Decision from Town of Aurora

As outlined in the document "4. Letter to AHS April 2025 - Decision from Town" that was sent out to the AHS membership ahead of the meeting:

- Town staff took the final report to a Closed Session of Council on March 25, 2025, sharing AHS's latest position. In April 2025, the Board received a letter from Robin McDougall, Director of Community Services outlining Council's decision to not participate in a substantive way with respect to the future of Hillary House.
- As stated in the letter "During the discussion, there was a consensus that Council was not comfortable with assuming the full financial responsibility (capital and operating) yet being held to the limiting restrictions on how the site can be used."
- They also offered support if the AHS was interested in issuing a public Expressions of Interest to see if there are any other interested parties or revisiting the possibility of the Town assuming Hillary House if there was a business model that has a Return on Investment (ROI).

c) Moving Forward

The Board of Directors noted their disappointment with Town of Aurora Council's decision, an outcome which appears to disregard the realities of the current situation and condition of Hillary House, as well as the results of the public engagement survey, which supported the preservation of Hillary House as a National Historic Site and museum with more involvement from the Town.

The Board requested ideas, comments, and suggestions from meeting attendees:

- Consensus that renewed fundraising efforts are required.
- Questions regarding Ontario Heritage Trust Conservation Agreement – most of the interior and exterior of Hillary House and the grounds are protected under a conservation easement. This is held on the title in perpetuity. Alterations require an application to the OHT.
 - OHT is a regulatory body, and not a granting agency.
 - OHT will not permit severing off any portion of property to sell.
 - OHT will not permit moving other historical building to the HH property.
- Co-Chairs Geoff and Al suggested a fundraising need of 100-300k a year for capital needs.
- Ideas for fundraising:
 - Save Hillary House campaign
 - Soliciting sponsorships from larger companies, especially Aurora-based
 - Using Hillary House as a film and production location
 - Advertise charitable tax receipts, in regards to estate planning

- Ask Town of Aurora if they would financially support in a smaller capacity through grants, including but not limited to, the new Heritage Grant Program
- Attendees suggested sending letters to Mayor and Council highlighting their displeasure with Council's decision and outcome of years-long discussions between AHS and Town to preserve Hillary House.

7. COMMENTS/QUESTIONS

The Board asked attendees to continue to be champions for the AHS and Hillary House in the community and to forward any further comments, questions, or suggestions via email.

8. NEXT STEPS

- The AHS is not considering issuing a public Expressions of Interest in regards to a potential sale of Hillary House at this time.
- The AHS will continue to operate Hillary House based on the allocated budget, while investigating ways to diversify revenue and trim expenses.
- The Board will review the recent Enhanced Condition Assessment to prioritize capital needs and develop 5- and 10-year restoration plans and fundraising goals.
- The Board will seek opportunities for fundraising opportunities, grant prospects, and capital investment to address critical needs.
- The Board will call upon the Membership and wider community as it prepares for fundraising campaigns.

9. ADJOURNMENT – 8:23p.m.

MOTION

THAT the meeting be adjourned at 8:23p.m. Moved by: Dan McGeown. Seconded by Timothy McCutcheon.

CARRIED.



MEMBERS' MEETING
Monday, June 9, 2025 at 7:00pm
Hillary House National Historic Site
& Virtually via Zoom
AGENDA

- 1. Call to Order**
- 2. Confirmation of Quorum**
- 3. Comments with Respect to Meeting Procedure**
- 4. Approval of Agenda**
- 5. Declarations of Conflict of Interest**
- 6. Co-Chair Remarks - Geoffrey Dawe & Alan Lambert**
 - a. Background on Discussions with Town of Aurora
 - b. Decision from Town of Aurora
 - c. Steps Moving Forward
- 7. Comments/Questions**
- 8. Next Steps**
- 9. Adjournment**

Reports Included:

- AHS_ Background on Discussions with Town
- AHS Submission to the Town of Aurora_Feb 02-25
- Letter to AHS April 2025 - Decision from Town



Background Information on the future of Hillary House

Who/What is the Aurora Historical Society

Founded in 1963, the Aurora Historical Society strives to be a vibrant community-focused champion, preserving and promoting Aurora's history and the Hillary House Museum, Aurora's National Historic Site. We do this through **Education**, **Preservation**, and **Restoration**.

Education: The AHS offers programs for young and old, ranging from our popular lecture series with knowledgeable guest speakers to hands-on crafts for children. We offer tours and changing exhibits at Hillary House; a growing online presence; and programs tailored to the interests of school groups and community organizations. We are storytellers, keeping the stories of our community and its people alive.

Preservation: In its formative years, the AHS played a leading role in preserving Aurora's historic Church Street School (now home to the Aurora Cultural Centre, Museum and Archives), the Aurora Railway Station, and Aurora's historic neighbourhoods. In 1981, the AHS acquired ownership of Hillary House in order to preserve this very special and architecturally significant Aurora landmark for present and future generations to enjoy. We strive to preserve Hillary House and its important collections of medical and household artifacts, books and documents according to the highest standards.

To further enhance the dedication to Preservation, the Aurora and District Historical Society (now the Aurora Historical Society), entered into an Easement Agreement with The Ontario Heritage Foundation (now the Ontario Heritage Trust - OHT). One of the objects of the OHT is "to support, encourage and facilitate the conservation, protection and preservation of the heritage of Ontario"

Restoration: As owners of Hillary House, the AHS is responsible for restoring this landmark to reflect its many roles in the life of our community as doctor's office, family home, and social centre with spacious lawns, gardens, and even a tennis court. We work closely with the Ontario Heritage Trust and Parks Canada, but ultimately the responsibility is ours. Restoration is costly and ongoing as we strive to maintain the highest possible standards.



Background and Timeline - Discussions with the Town of Aurora

November 9, 2022

Pre-consultation meeting between Patricia Wallace, AHS President, Alan Lambert, AHS Vice-President, Town of Aurora Mayor Tom Mrakas, and CAO Doug Nadorozny to explore financial sustainability options for Hillary House.

January 2023 – October 2023

Further meetings and discussions between Co-Chairs, Alan Lambert & Geoffrey Dawe and Town Staff. This included meetings at the Town and on-site at Hillary House to familiarize Town staff with the “inner workings” of Hillary House.

November 2023

AHS received a request from the Town of Aurora to engage ERA Architects to prepare an Enhanced Condition Assessment report. The goal was to build on the original Condition Assessment report that ERA prepared in 2017. The report was commissioned with the costs being split between the AHS and the Town. The report was later sent to the AHS Membership as part of the Special Members meeting that was held February 2024 (referenced below).

December 2023

Based on a review of a recent Enhanced Condition Assessment Report, dated December 21, 2023, prepared by ERA Architects of Toronto, and in consideration of the AHS’ current financial situation, it became more and more clear to the AHS Board of Directors that the obligations of maintaining/preserving Hillary House were exceeding the AHS’ ability to raise the necessary funds required to meet those obligations.

February 2024

The AHS Board of Directors called a Special Members’ Meeting, held on February 28, 2024, to outline concerns to the Members and to seek their input on a path forward. The result of that meeting was a Motion, duly moved, seconded and carried, that authorized the Board of Directors to enter into formal discussions with the Town of Aurora to see what options for the future sustainability of Hillary House would be available.



March - November 2024

In addition to the AHS Executive continuing to communicate with Town staff, both by email and in-person meetings, two other significant events occurred:

- **Town-wide Survey:** Town staff, with assistance of the AHS, prepared and issued a public survey in the fall of 2024 to solicit input on Hillary House and gauge potential support for the Town participating in the future Hillary House. The main finding of the survey was that 89% of the respondents agreed that the Town of Aurora should acquire Hillary House and keep it operating in its current mode, namely, a historic house museum.
- **Commercial Interest Visitors:** At the request of the Town, the AHS hosted two groups of visitors who had expressed interest in the potential commercial uses of Hillary House.

December 2024

The results of the survey were presented to Council during the Committee of the Whole Meeting on December 2, 2024 in a report by Robin McDougall, Director of Community Services. AHS Co-Chair Geoffrey Dawe attended that Committee Meeting in support of Director McDougall's report.

At the meeting, Councillor Thompson asked Director McDougall if responses from non-Aurora residents had been removed, and if not, could that be done with the new results forwarded to Council. A subsequent report was sent to Council showing a minor change in the results - in that support for the Town acquiring and maintaining Hillary House as an operating museum dropped from 89% to 87%.

Council accepted the report at the subsequent Council meeting.

January - February 2025

AHS representatives met again with Town Staff on January 17, 2025, to discuss next steps. The Board was asked to clarify the options that they foresaw and to submit a written report (see "AHS Submission to the Town of Aurora_Feb 02-25").

March 2025

Town staff took a report to a Closed Session of Council on March 25, 2025, sharing AHS's latest position.



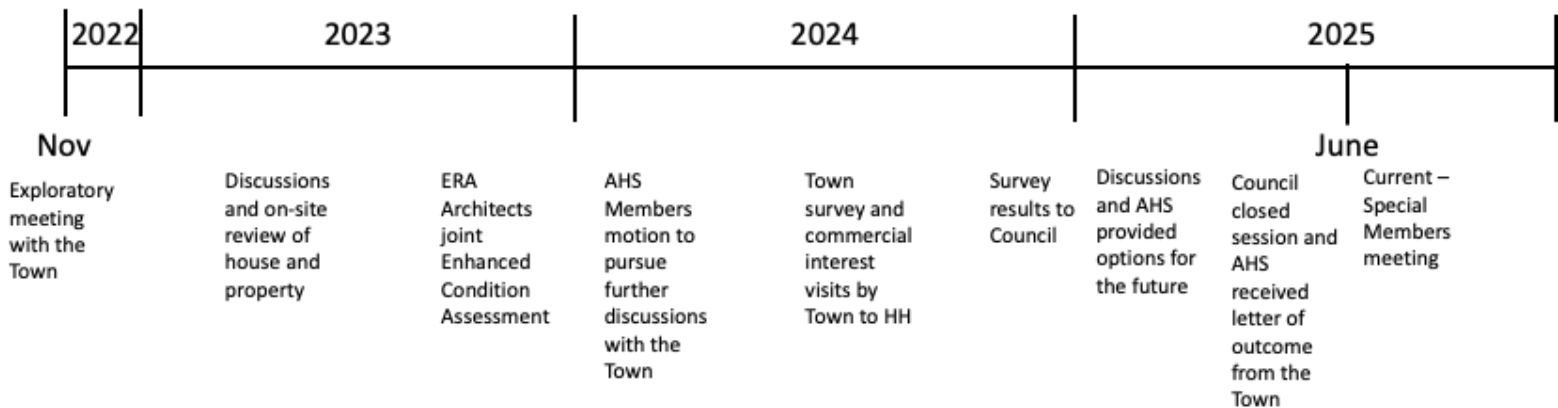
April 2025

AHS received a letter from Robin McDougall, Director of Community Services outlining Council's decision to not participate in a substantive way with respect to the future of Hillary House (see "Letter to AHS April 2025 - Decision from Town").

May 2025

The AHS concluded that a follow up Special Members meeting would be held in June of 2025 to update the membership and to seek their input.

Timeline – AHS engagement of the Town of Aurora re: Future of Hillary House





Monday February 3, 2025

Robin McDougall
Director, Community Services
Town of Aurora,
100 John West Way
Aurora, ON L4G 6J1

Dear Robin,

The Aurora Historical Society (AHS) appreciates the ongoing dialogue with the Town of Aurora relating to the future of our national treasure, Hillary House. Thank you for reaching out to meet with us recently to discuss the next steps with the town. As discussed, we are pleased to send this letter to you to inform the pending discussions at Town Council.

Based on our discussion, we wanted to reiterate the position and intentions of the AHS, its Board and Members. We have also reflected on the recent Town facilitated survey relating to the future of Hillary House.

In summary:

- Our mandate to continue working with the Town of Aurora toward a mutually beneficial future for Hillary House remains sound and focused on the preservation of Hillary House;
- The AHS remains genuinely concerned that our current funding does not allow for proactively addressing challenges to the site articulated in the recent Enhanced Condition Report conducted by ERA Architects and jointly funded by the town and the AHS;
- The AHS has taken additional guidance from the recent survey conducted by the Town relating to the future of Hillary House, and the overwhelming preference to maintain Hillary House as a national historic site, “as is”;
- The AHS remains open to consider previously discussed options for the Town and AHS and the future of Hillary House (see summary in the background information provided).

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Our suggested option, subject to approval of the full membership of the Aurora Historical Society, is assumption by the Town of assets and effective operations of the Aurora Historical Society, and the reasoning behind that suggestion is detailed in the attached document.

Robin, thank you very much for all your assistance with these discussions. It is very much appreciated.

Sincerely

Geoffrey Dawe & Alan Lambert
Co-Chair,
Aurora Historical Society.

CC: AHS Board of Directors

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Background Information of and suggested option on the future of the Aurora Historical Society, and its primary asset, Hillary House

Please note that this summary document is to be read in conjunction with and is an integral part of the overview letter to Director McDougall.

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To further enhance the dedication to Preservation, the Aurora and District Historical Society (now the Aurora Historical Society), entered into an Easement Agreement with The Ontario Heritage Foundation (now the Ontario Heritage Trust - OHT). One of the objects of the OHT is "to support, encourage and facilitate the conservation, protection and preservation of the heritage of Ontario"

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Restoration: As owners of Hillary House, the AHS is responsible for restoring this landmark to reflect its many roles in the life of our community as doctor's office, family home, and social centre with spacious lawns, gardens, and even a tennis court. We work closely with the Ontario Heritage Trust and Parks Canada, but ultimately the responsibility is ours. Restoration is costly and ongoing as we strive to maintain the highest possible standards.

Background

Based on a review of a recent Enhanced Condition Assessment Report, dated December 21, 2023, prepared by ERA Architects of Toronto, and in consideration of our current financial situation, it has become more and more clear that the obligations of maintaining/preserving Hillary House are exceeding our ability to raise the necessary funds required to meet those obligations.

The Board therefore called a Special Members Meeting, which was held in February 28th of 2024, to outline our concerns to the Members and to seek their input on a path forward.

The result of that meeting was a Motion, duly moved, seconded and carried that authorized the Board to enter into discussions with the Town of Aurora to see what options would be available.

Discussions have been going on over the last year with Staff and Council, with the first action item being a Survey that the Town, with the assistance of the AHS, was issued for public input in the fall of 2024. The main finding of the survey was that more than 87% of the respondents agreed that the Town should acquire Hillary House and keep it operating in its current mode, namely, an operating house museum.

The Survey was presented to Council during the Committee of the Whole Meeting, December 2, 2024 in a report by Robin McDougall, Director of Community Services. Council accepted the report at the subsequent Council meeting.

We then met again with Staff on January 17, 2025, to discuss next steps. The Board was asked to clarify the options that they foresaw and to submit a written report.



Options

Option 1 – Status Quo

This option is to simply stay the course, operating as we currently are. The Board does not see this as a viable option to properly preserve Hillary House.

Option 2 – Hybrid

This would emulate the Aurora Cultural Centre corporate structure, that is, a Registered Charitable Corporation with its own Board of Directors. It operates out of 22 Church Street, in Aurora, a facility owned and operated by the Town of Aurora.

The ACC received a substantial operating grant from the Town. In addition, they have implemented a successful fundraising team.

All programming is a function of the ACC programming staff.

Option 3 – Full Assumption by the Town of Aurora.

Hillary House, the grounds and the effective operations of the AHS would be assumed by the Town.

Preferred Option of the Aurora Historical Society

The Board has reflected on:

- the options (as outlined above);
- the results of the survey, and
- discussions with the Ontario Heritage Trust (to better understand both its strictures and the “art of the possible”)

and are prepared to recommend to the Members of the Aurora Historical Society that the long-term interests of Hillary House, specifically, to maintain its status as a National Historic Site and to continue operations “as is”, would be best served by Option 3 – full assumption by the Town of Aurora.

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It is envisioned that AHS would continue as an operating entity to continue to support Hillary House. For example, as a registered charity, the AHS would have access grants that are not available to the Town.

Specifically, the Town of Aurora would acquire ownership of the Hillary House asset (that is, the actual house, the barn and the property), along with the effective operations of the Aurora Historical Society, with a commitment to maintaining operations “as is”. And further, that a reconstituted Aurora Historical Society is allowed to operate out of Hillary House.

The Aurora Historical Society in turn commits to not only maintaining its role in preserving and promoting Aurora’s history, but of enhancing that role. In fact, the AHS has already started the process of expanding its fund raising, and we commit to continuing on that path.

Conclusion

The Aurora Historical Society is very grateful to the Town of Aurora for its commitment to and support of Hillary House, past and present and we look forward to working together to create a dynamic community hub to the benefit of the residents of Aurora.

Dated: February 03, 2025



Community Services
Robin McDougall
(905) 726-4717
rmcdougall@aurora.ca

Town of Aurora
100 John West Way
Aurora, Ontario L4G 6J1
www.aurora.ca

April 11, 2025

Sent by Email

Aurora Historical Society
15372 Yonge Street
Aurora, ON L4G 1N8

Attention Mr. Dawe and Mr. Lambert

Please accept this letter in response to the letter the Aurora Historical Society (AHS) submitted to the Town on February 3, 2025.

Staff took a report to Council on March 25, 2025, sharing AHS's latest position and recommendation of Option 3 (full assumption by the Town of Aurora and to maintain its status as a National Historic Site and to continue operations "as is"). During the discussion, there was a consensus that Council was not comfortable with assuming the full financial responsibility (capital and operating) yet being held to the limiting restrictions on how the site can be used.

Additional discussion took place regarding other alternatives. It was suggested that AHS could issue a public Expressions of Interest to see if there are any other interested parties. If AHS is interested, the Town could assist while AHS remains in full control of the message/process.

Staff were also directed by Council to revisit the possibility if the Town operates the facility to see if there is a business model that has a return on investment (ROI).

As such Council received the report and directed staff to connect with AHS to suggest the Expression of Interest option.

Sincerely,

Robin McDougall
Director, Community Services