



MEMORANDUM

TO: Heritage Markham Committee

FROM: Regan Hutcheson, Manager-Heritage Planning

DATE: March 13, 2024

SUBJECT: Interpretive Plaque Program
Request for Funding Assistance – Thornhill Historical Society
Group of Seven Artist Project

Project: Group of Seven Thornhill Heritage Plaque Recognition Program

Background:

- The City currently participates in a heritage conservation district house plaque program which identifies significant cultural heritage resources within heritage districts. The first building owner and occupation as well as the date of construction are included on the plaque. To date, the City has worked primarily with the Markham Village Conservancy (MVC) to advance this program in Markham Village. The City has provided funding for a portion of the plaque cost (\$175) with the remaining costs funded by the MVC and the property owner.
- The Thornhill Historical Society (THS) has contacted the City to request financial assistance in support of a Group of Seven Thornhill heritage plaque recognition program. The THS is a volunteer-run, not-for-profit registered charity that “leads in the preservation of Thornhill’s built, cultural, documentary, and natural heritage for the benefit of our community, through focused advocacy, events, and educational programming”.
- THS will be celebrating its 50th anniversary in 2024. To mark this occasion, THS is planning a couple of initiatives that will have a lasting benefit to the Thornhill community. One of their signature projects is to highlight the presence of the Group of Seven artists in Thornhill by creating and installing small plaques to be affixed to the front of each of the heritage homes where members of the Group of Seven resided. They envision this as a pilot project to resume a heritage plaque program in Thornhill. This program aims to acknowledge and celebrate the often overlooked presence of the Group of Seven in Thornhill (see Appendix C).

- According to the THS, the presence of these plaques will also be enhanced by THS's Thornhill Heritage Walking Tour. To achieve these goals, THS is seeking financial support to help cover the cost of producing and installing the plaques, as well as the administration of the program. Each plaque would cost approximately \$776 (or \$3,100 in total). See Appendix B for plaque design and proposed placement.
- Group of Seven artists lived in the following houses located within the Thornhill-Markham Conservation District (see Appendix A):
 - Francis Hans (Franz) Johnston – 14 John Street
 - Arthur Lismer – 22 John Street
 - Franklin Carmichael – 68 John Street
 - Frederick Horsman Varley – 170 John Street
- THS is engaging with the City of Vaughan for funding for a similar plaque for 18 Centre Street, the first Thornhill home of JEH MacDonald and family.

Status/ Staff Comment

- Although the THS program is not exactly consistent with the objectives of the City's interpretive plaque program for significant properties in heritage district which focuses on the original owner and date of building construction, the THS project aims to celebrate important Canadian artists who once resided on these Thornhill heritage properties.
- The cost to the City would be \$700 (\$175 x 4) and could be funded from the Heritage Preservation Account. This Heritage Reserve Fund holds any monies drawn from Heritage Letters of Credit (in situations where heritage buildings have been damaged or destroyed or not restored as per approved plans, the letter of credit is drawn by the City). In 1991, Council created a special Reserve and adopted the Heritage Reserve Fund Guidelines describing the criteria and procedures for approval.
- Monies collected are to be used to provide funding in four general program areas including municipal projects of a heritage communicative nature such as historic plaques and signage.
- All projects being considered for financial assistance from this fund must be reviewed by Heritage Markham and approved by Council.
- It is recommended that Heritage Markham lend its support to this unique and celebratory heritage project and encourage Council to provide funding consistent with the City's commitment to the existing heritage district plaque program.

Suggested Recommendation for Heritage Markham

That Heritage Markham supports the concept of the Thornhill Historical Society's Group of Seven Thornhill Heritage Plaque Recognition Program and recommends that Council provide financial assistance for each plaque consistent with funding provided through the City's 'Interpretive Plaques for Properties of Cultural Heritage Value or Interest in Heritage Conservation Districts' program.

Appendices

- Appendix A Group of Seven Properties/Locations
- Appendix B Proposed Plaque Design and Placement
- Appendix C History of the Group of Seven in Thornhill

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Appendix A – Group of Seven Properties/Locations

GROUP OF SEVEN COMMEMORATIVE PLAQUE LOCATIONS



J.E.H. MACDONALD
18 CENTRE STREET



FRANCIS JOHNSON
14 JOHN STREET



ARTHUR LISMER
22 JOHN STREET



FRANKLIN CARMICHAEL
68 JOHN STREET



FRED VARLEY
170 JOHN STREET



Appendix B – Proposed Plaque Design and Placement

GROUP OF SEVEN

COMMEMORATIVE PLAQUE

PLAQUE & POSITIONING OPTIONS



LEFT/RIGHT SIDE OF THE BUILDING



FRONT ENTRANCE OF THE BUILDING



ABOVE OR BELOW HOUSE PLAQUE



PLAQUE DETAILS

CAST ALUMINUM PLAQUE

BRUSHED ALUMINUM BORDER AND RAISED TEXT

STANDARD SATIN CLEAR COATING

LEATHERETTE BACKGROUND TEXTURE

SIZE: 10" X 17", 5/16" THICK

MOUNTING: SCREWS, COUNTERSUNK

Appendix C – History of the Group of Seven in Thornhill

A COLOURFUL PALETTE: ARTISTS OF THORNHILL

IN THE EARLY 20TH CENTURY, THE VILLAGE OF THORNHILL WAS A SMALL RURAL COMMUNITY OF ABOUT 700 RESIDENTS, A NUMBER THAT HAD REMAINED LITTLE CHANGED SINCE THE TIME OF CONFEDERATION. THE DON RIVER VALLEY, ONCE THE LIFELINE OF THE AREA'S MILLING INDUSTRY IN THE 19TH CENTURY, HAD BEEN TRANSFORMED INTO A MINERAL SPRING AND RESORT PARK. THE INSTALLATION OF THE YONGE STREET RADIAL RAILWAY LINE IN 1896 FACILITATED THIS NEWFOUND LOCAL INDUSTRY AND PROVIDED A VIABLE LINK TO TORONTO FOR BOTH PASSENGERS AND CARGO ALIKE.

THORNHILL'S PASTORAL BEAUTY, COUPLED WITH CONVENIENT ACCESS TO THE CITY, MADE THE SMALL COMMUNITY AN APPEALING PLACE OF RESIDENCE FOR EARLY COMMUTERS. AMONG THESE WAS J.E.H. MACDONALD, WHO, WITH HIS WIFE JOAN AND THEIR YOUNG SON THOREAU, FIRST MADE THORNHILL THEIR HOME IN 1912, LEASING THE BRICK HOUSE AT 18 CENTRE STREET. AFTER TWO YEARS, THE MACDONALDS MOVED WEST ON CENTRE STREET TO THE SMALL FOUR-ACRE FARM THEY CALLED "FOUR ELMS". IT WAS HERE J.E.H. MACDONALD CREATED SOME OF HIS MOST FAMOUS WORKS, INCLUDING A TANGLED GARDEN IN 1916. PRIOR TO THE FORMATION OF THE GROUP OF SEVEN, THE MACDONALD'S THORNHILL FARM PLAYED HOST TO OTHER VISITING GROUP MEMBERS, SEVERAL OF WHOM WOULD CALL THE VILLAGE HOME BEFORE 1920. FOR A BRIEF TIME BEFORE 1916, ARTHUR LISMER RENTED THE ONE-AND-A-HALF-STORY FRAME HOME AT 22 JOHN STREET. IT WAS HERE THAT LISMER PAINTED MY GARDEN, THORNHILL, ABOUT 1916. AROUND THE SAME TIME, GROUP MEMBER FRANZ JOHNSTON HAD TAKEN UP RESIDENCE A FEW HOUSES WEST ALONG JOHN STREET, IN A HOUSE NOW NUMBERED 14 JOHN STREET. FARTHER EAST ON JOHN STREET, FRANKLIN CARMICHAEL RENTED A SMALL COTTAGE BESIDE THE THORNHILL CEMETERY, FROM ABOUT 1916 TO 1920. FRED VARLEY WAS ALSO A RESIDENT OF JOHN STREET DURING THE WORLD WAR ONE ERA. HE RENTED A FORMER MILL WORKER'S COTTAGE AT 170 JOHN STREET KNOWN AS THE POMONA MILL HOUSE, NAMED FOR THE GRIST MILLS THAT ONCE OCCUPIED THE VALLEY BELOW. WHILE THEIR TIME IN THORNHILL WAS BRIEF, THE FOUR FUTURE GROUP OF SEVEN MEMBERS WHO LIVED ON THE NORTH SIDE OF JOHN STREET FOR A SHORT TIME BEFORE 1920, SURELY TOOK ADVANTAGE OF THE LOCAL SETTING AS A SOURCE OF ARTISTIC INSPIRATION.

EXCERPT FROM THE THORNHILL CIRCLE, J.E.H. MACDONALD AND HIS ASSOCIATES. 2006
VARLEY ART GALLERY OF MARKHAM