



Report to: Development Services Committee

Meeting Date: April 2, 2024

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**SUBJECT:** Recommendation Report, Request for Funding Assistance, Group of Seven Thornhill Heritage Plaque Recognition Project

**PREPARED BY:** Regan Hutcheson, Manager, Heritage Planning, ext. 2080

**REVIEWED BY:** Stephen Lue, Senior Development Manager, ext. 2520

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**RECOMMENDATION:**

1. THAT the staff report, dated April 2, 2024, titled, "Recommendation Report, Request for Funding Assistance, Group of Seven Thornhill Heritage Plaque Recognition Project", be received;
2. THAT the concept of the Thornhill Historical Society's Group of Seven Thornhill Heritage Plaque Recognition Project is supported and that the City 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 at a total cost of \$700.00;
3. THAT the funding be provided from the Heritage Preservation Account (087 2800 115);
4. AND THAT Staff be authorized and directed to do all things necessary to give effect to this resolution.

**PURPOSE:**

This report provides information on the Thornhill Historical Society's Group of Seven Thornhill Heritage Plaque Recognition Project and its request for financial assistance from the City of Markham ("the City").

**BACKGROUND:**

*The City currently participates in a plaque program that celebrates significant cultural heritage resources within heritage districts*

The existing 'Interpretive Plaques for Properties of Cultural Heritage Value or Interest in Heritage Conservation Districts' program identifies the first building owner and occupation and the date of construction on the plaque. To date, the City worked primarily with the Markham Village Conservancy ("MVC") to advance this program in the Markham Village Heritage Conservation District. 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") requests 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." The THS will celebrate its 50th anniversary in 2024. To mark this occasion, one of its signature projects is to highlight the presence of the Group of Seven artists in Thornhill by creating and affixing small plaques to the front of each of the heritage homes where members of the Group of Seven resided. THS envision this as a pilot project to potentially 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 A).

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THS seeks financial assistance to help cover the cost of producing and installing the plaques. Each plaque would cost approximately \$776 (or \$3,100 in total). See Appendix C for plaque design and proposed placement. Group of Seven artists lived in the following houses located within the Thornhill-Markham Conservation District (see Appendix B):

- 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.

***Heritage Markham Committee recommends that Council provide financial assistance***

Heritage Markham, on March 13, 2024, supported the concept and recommended that financial assistance for each plaque be consistent with funding provided through the City's 'Interpretive Plaques for Properties of Cultural Heritage Value or Interest in Heritage Conservation Districts' program for a total contribution of \$700.00

**OPTIONS/ DISCUSSION:**

***The THS project has a slightly different focus than the City's current heritage district plaque program***

Although the THS program is not exactly consistent with the objectives of the City's interpretive plaque program for significant properties in heritage districts that focuses on the original owner and date of building construction, the THS project aims to celebrate significant Canadian artists who once resided at these Thornhill heritage properties.

***The City's Heritage Preservation Account could be used to contribute to the THS project***

Using the same funding premise as the City's existing interpretive plaque program, the cost to the City would be \$700 (\$175 x 4). The Heritage Preservation Account (Heritage Reserve Fund) holds funds 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 fund four general program areas, one being projects of a municipal heritage communicative nature, such as historic plaques and signage. All projects considered for financial assistance from this fund must be reviewed by Heritage Markham and approved by Council.

Staff recommend the City support this unique and celebratory heritage project and that Council fund it in an amount consistent with the City's commitment to the existing heritage district plaque program.

**FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS:**

Financial assistance in the amount of \$700 could be funded from the Heritage Preservation Account (Heritage Reserve Fund), Account 087 2800 115.

**HUMAN RESOURCES CONSIDERATIONS:**

Not Applicable.

**ALIGNMENT WITH STRATEGIC PRIORITIES:**

The protection and celebration of cultural heritage resources is part of the City's Growth Management Strategy.

**BUSINESS UNITS CONSULTED AND AFFECTED:**

Heritage Markham Committee was consulted.

**RECOMMENDED BY:**

Giulio Cescato, RPP, MCIP  
Director of Planning and Urban Design

Arvin Prasad, RPP, MCIP  
Commissioner of Development Services

**ATTACHMENTS:**

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

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## Appendix A – 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

## Appendix B – 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 C – 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