

**Region of Waterloo**  
**Planning, Development, and Legislative Services**  
**Cultural Services**

---

**To:** Community and Health Services Committee

**Meeting Date:** May 5, 2026

**Report Title:** Doon Heritage Village Re-Opening Update

---

**1. Recommendation**

For information.

**2. Purpose / Issue:**

Doon Heritage Village is reopening to the community, with improved utility infrastructure, accessibility features, update site interpretation to reflect the diverse history of Waterloo Region and a new brand identity. This report outlines the work that has been undertaken, and the planned grand re-opening of the Village on July 1, 2026.

**3. Strategic Plan:**

Climate Aligned Growth

Equitable Services and Opportunities

**4. Report Highlights:**

- Doon Heritage Village (DHV) will reopen to the public with expanded storytelling that reflects the rich and diverse history of the region, multi-sensory and theatric experiences, improved accessibility, upgraded utility and safety features, along with a new logo and tagline, “One village, many stories.”
- A grand re-opening of Doon Heritage Village will be held on July 1, 2026, from 11 am to 4 pm. Village buildings will be fully open and staffed with costumed interpreters, and farm animals will return for the summer. The event, called “Back to the Village”, will include musicians, face painting, square dancing, a BBQ and food services, and tractor drawn wagon rides. Reduced admission rate (\$2.00 per person) will apply for July 1 only.
- Throughout July and August, the Village will be open 7 days from 11 a.m. - 4 p.m.

- Upgrades to the Village have consisted of four major pillars: Collections Care; Construction; Community Engagement; and Interpretation and Public Programming.
- Collections care ensured the careful preservation of both the historic buildings and the artifacts in them by museum curatorial staff during the closure and construction upgrades. The closure also provided time to perform conservation treatments on several of the artifacts in the buildings, fully clean and inventory each building's contents, and update some of the furnishings.
- Construction upgrades resulted in improved accessibility and AODA compliant features, modernized utilities, and updated security and safety features in all buildings. AODA upgrades were partially supported by an Enhancing Access to Spaces for Everyone (EASE) grant through the Government of Ontario.
- Community engagement initiatives welcomed the stories, cultures and traditions of residents who did not see their own cultural history represented in Region of Waterloo Museums and Archives, leading to the creation of a new Interpretive Plan for Doon Heritage Village.
- Interpretation planning incorporated input from community engagement to shape a new Interpretive Plan with stories historically missing or underrepresented, told with care, accuracy and community involvement. DHV continues to be set in 1914, but the year is now used as a jumping off point, allowing staff to share stories that came before and after, providing context about how our community has evolved.
- Piloted experiences were offered to the public in fall 2025 to gauge interest in new programming initiatives and to gather feedback. Experiences included guided forest walks, foodways program featuring Black and Indigenous chefs, a collaborative exhibit with Vintage Black Canada, and patio planters updated with native plants used by Indigenous peoples with signage. Due to the success of these initiatives, they will continue to be offered in 2026.
- Information around the reopening of Doon Heritage Village can be found at [www.regionofwaterloomuseums.ca](http://www.regionofwaterloomuseums.ca)

## **5. Background:**

The Region of Waterloo's Doon Heritage Village site is a 60 acre living history museum that opened in 1957. For decades Doon Heritage Village has shared what life was like for some community members in rural Waterloo Region in 1914. Its living history

programs brought to life the early years of the 1900s with costumed interpreters, hands-on activities, guided tours, special events and school class visits.

Council approved the 2023 budget which contained a recommendation to temporarily pause operations at Doon Heritage Village for 2023-2024 to undertake the much needed Utilities Replacement Project in the Village. Operations continued to be paused in 2024-2025 due to delays in the Utilities Replacement Project and to allow additional community engagement and interpretative planning to occur.

At the same time, living history sites across the country, including DHV, examined how they would remain relevant, not just in how they tell stories, but also what stories they tell. This intention led to a robust community engagement initiative to welcome the stories, cultures and traditions of residents who may not have previously seen their cultural history represented in Region of Waterloo Museums and Archives.

Doon Heritage Village temporarily closed to the public between 2023 and 2025. Site work that was completed includes modernizing the utilities, improving accessibility by adding AODA compliant features, and updating security and fire alarms in all the buildings.

Modernizing the utilities included removing overhead electrical wires and burying them underground, upgrading and installing new electrical panels in all buildings, installation of fiber cable throughout DHV, and upgraded transformers. The completion of this project will support future site development in DHV, including the installation of Wi-Fi, replacement of propane furnaces with heat pumps, and upgraded visitor amenities.

Museum staff completed community engagement during the closure, resulting in an updated overall interpretive plan for Doon Heritage Village that incorporates REDI principles and a contemporary museum lens.

During the closure, all previously booked rentals in DHV were honoured as was the agreement with Crow Shield Lodge. A limited number of public events (Doors Open, reduced Christmas programming) and school programs were able to be offered in DHV during the closure.

The reopening of DHV will feature a new children's outdoor play space generously sponsored by the FRIENDS of Region of Waterloo Museums. A large pavilion/shade structure will add to the visitor amenities provided on site and will be available to rent. New wayfinding signage (supported through a Regional Tourism Organization 4 Inc. [RTO4] grant) and AODA upgrades (EASE grant) will make navigating DHV easier for all visitors. Canadian Pacific Railway locomotive 894, the first thing visitors see as they enter DHV, has been refurbished and repainted.

Doon Heritage Village will officially re-open on July 1, 2026, with the "Back to the Village" event from 11 am to 4 pm. Village buildings will be fully open and staffed and farm animals will return for the summer. A reduced admission rate (\$2.00 per person)

will apply for July 1 only. The community is invited to come and experience this important Doon milestone.

Following the Grand Re-opening, DHV will be open throughout July and August, 7 days a week, from 11 a.m. - 4 p.m. Hours will be reduced beginning in September, but museum staff expect a busy fall of school programs and special events, including the much anticipated return of Starry Night.

## **6. Communication and Engagement with Area Municipalities and the Public**

### **Area Municipalities:**

Area Municipalities have been updated on the progress of Doon's utility and interpretive work through the working group of Arts and Culture leads (Kitchener, Cambridge and Waterloo). The City of Kitchener's Heritage Planning Team was involved in phase 1 of the Doon Reimaging process, providing important information on Kitchener's Lower Doon Cultural Heritage Landscape Plan.

### **Public:**

In 2024, Museum staff collected valuable ideas and feedback from the community on how to update and enhance Doon Heritage Village which can be found in a [Regional Council report summarizing the findings](#); and in the [Full engagement report](#).

Input from community engagement helped shape new themes for interpretation at Doon Heritage Village, and were guided by three key principles:

- **Theatricality:** Using immersive, playful, and dramatic storytelling to engage audiences.
- **Multi-Sensory Experiences:** Incorporating tactile, visual, auditory, and olfactory elements to appeal to diverse learning styles and abilities.
- **Expanded Stories:** Collaborating with communities to ensure inclusive and accurate storytelling, addressing both celebratory and difficult aspects of history.

After these themes were shared back and validated through a community survey, staff incorporated the themes into a new Interpretive Plan (IP) - a plan that outlines how we communicate the meaning of our collections, spaces and stories to visitors. The IP includes direction around incorporating the natural spaces and flora found on the 60 acre site into the interpretation, inclusion of diverse perspectives through partnerships and collaboration, and acknowledgement that interpretation at DHV will continue to evolve as more research is completed and information is discovered.

This plan was put into action in fall 2025 with new experiences piloted to the public to gauge interest in new programming initiatives and to gather feedback to further refine the onsite experience. These piloted experiences included guided forest walks,

foodways program featuring Black and Indigenous chefs, a collaborative exhibit with Vintage Black Canada, and patio planters updated with native plants used by Indigenous peoples with signage. Due to the success of these initiatives, they will continue to be offered in 2026 – along with more engaging stories, features and experiences when the site reopens this summer.

A robust communications plan is underway to support DHV’s reopening and drive community awareness of the Grand Reopening event and ongoing open hours, including traditional media, social media, content creators, sponsorships and collaborations.

**7. Financial Implications:**

	<b>Current Year</b>	<b>Future Year(s)</b>
<b>Budget Impact?</b>	No new impact	Annualized into budget
<b>Capital Plan Impact?</b>	No new impact	No new impact

There is no new financial implications for the Re-Opening of Doon Heritage Village. Staff are working within the 2026 approved Museum budget.

**8. Conclusion / Next Steps:**

After undergoing infrastructure improvements and community engagement, Doon Heritage Village will reopen on July 1, 2026, with an updated interpretive plan and refreshed identity that supports expanded storytelling under a new tagline “One Village, Many Stories”. The public is encouraged to visit the museums website: [regionofwaterloomuseums.ca](http://regionofwaterloomuseums.ca) for up-to-date information on hours, admission and event details.

**9. Attachments:**

Appendix A: Presentation – Doon Heritage Village Re-Opening

**Prepared By:** Stacy McLennan, Acting Manager, Region of Waterloo Museums and Archives

Hilary Abel, Manager, Communications and Community Engagement

**Reviewed By:** Julian Kingston, Director Cultural Services

**Approved By:** Rod Regier, Commissioner, Planning, Development and Legislative Services.