

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

To: Community and Health Services Committee
Meeting Date: December 5, 2023
Report Title: Doon Heritage Village Refresh Project Update

1. Recommendation

For information.

2. Purpose / Issue:

To provide Regional Council with an update on the progress refresh initiatives at Doon Heritage Village, including the utility infrastructure upgrade, interpretation plans and public programs.

3. Strategic Plan:

Homes for all, Climate Aligned Growth, Equitable Services and Opportunities, and Resilient and Future Ready Organization.

4. Report Highlights:

- Region of Waterloo Museums and Archives Staff are working on a variety of initiatives to ensure the long-term sustainability and accessibility of Doon Heritage Village. These initiatives include capital upgrades and community engagement to ensure future interpretive programs reflect a more holistic perspective on the history of Waterloo Region. This is an important investment in the long-term viability, flexibility and sustainability of the site.
- Since Council approval of a major utility upgrade of water, electrical, heating and Wi-Fi infrastructure, living history interpretation at Doon Heritage Village has been paused.
- While the traditional living history programming is paused, there continue to be activities and events in the museum's outdoor spaces including, Family Games Day, Mighty Trucks Day. Horticultural staff and volunteers have continue to maintain the gardens in the village and the site was used as a shoot location a recently aired episode of Murdoch Mysteries. The Friends of the Waterloo

Region Museum also supported a Kid's Halloween and will run the popular Starry Night event on December 16.

- The two-year refresh project was designed to take place in two phases. The original intention was to have construction begin in the upper area of the village to allow time to remove artifacts and honour rental arrangements in the lower area of the village in the first year. The bulk of the construction would take place during the second year of the project.
- There was low response from bidders to the initial two-phase construction schedule and quotes came in significantly over budget. The project has been re-tendered as a single stage project. Though this has garnered more interest, the costs are still higher than anticipated. A report will be submitted to Council on January 24, 2024 to award the tender."
- Construction is anticipated to begin in January 2024 and be completed in September 2024. Living history interpretation in Doon Heritage Village will resume Spring 2025.
- Staff are working to include community input in the refresh project. A series of focus groups will begin in January and run until spring 2024. An Engage Page will be launched for the community to share their ideas and memories. New programming ideas will be developed with local historians and other experts, and tested throughout the summer.

5. Background:

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.

The aim of the project is to future-proof the village, putting infrastructure and interpretive planning in place to make Doon Heritage Village more flexible, accessible, safe and sustainable. The plans prioritize equity, visitor experience, accessibility, health and safety and environmental sustainability.

This project consists of four major pillars: Collections Care; Construction; Community Engagement; and Interpretation and Public Programming.

Collections Care

It is anticipated that the construction project will be disruptive. Staff have been working over the past year to remove textiles and other sensitive artefacts from village buildings, particularly in the lower area of the village. Curatorial staff are creating space in the

storage areas of the Curatorial Centre to store artifacts. Larger objects have been covered in place to ensure their safety once construction begins.

Construction

The utilities tender was issued in October 2023, award of this tender is scheduled for the December 13, 2023 Council meeting.

Construction will include Water mains, Wi-Fi, road resurfacing, and the burial of overhead electrical wires. This will put in place infrastructure for better lighting for evening events, reliable heating for year-round programs, access to water for on-site conservation work and fire response, and buried electrical wires, for time-appropriate appearance, as well as reducing the chance of broken cables with increasing storms that cause trees to fall.

Construction is anticipated to begin in January 2024 and is anticipated to be completed in September 2024.

While living history programming has been paused, other construction projects have also been possible including remediating a well cap, removal of the millstone shed, the re-chinking of the weavery, and the refurbishment of the Martin House porch.

Community Engagement

Around the world, living history sites are having to look at how they remain relevant, not just in how they tell stories, but also what stories they tell. This initiative will be an important project, not only for the ongoing relevance of the Region of Waterloo Museums and Archives, but also contribute to wider museum learning.

An engagement process is underway to understand what is important to the community and what is currently missing from our storytelling.

To date we have undertaken consultation with onsite visitors. Overall, initial findings are that there is significant good will towards to village. However, there has also been a recognition that the stories of diverse populations have not been visible.

Staff have developed a formal stakeholder engagement plan that includes targeted interviews, focus group discussions, and outreach events. These engagement sessions will collect reactions and impressions from long-standing visitors as well as people who may not currently see themselves reflected in the narratives that have traditionally been told in the village. The plan includes:

- **Community Workshops** (November 2023 – February 2024): A series of interactive focus-group sessions will be held to explore specific themes to identify opportunities for enhancement or reinterpretation. These sessions will be run in collaboration with experts to ensure historical accuracy and cultural sensitivity in the presentation of artifacts.
- **Online Survey** (January 2024): reach a broad and diverse audience using EngageWR to gather quantitative data on visitor preferences, interests, and feedback as well as opportunities to share their memories of Doon Heritage Village.
- **Community Outreach Events** (February - March 2024): The museum will host a variety of outreach events to share preliminary findings, gather additional input, and create a sense of ownership among community members.

Interpretation and Public Programming

Reviewing the interpretive program of Doon Heritage to ensure the museum is representing a holistic and enriching perspective on the history of Waterloo Region is essential to the site's long-term sustainability. Harold Johnson, puts it in his book "The Power of Story : On Truth, the Trickster, and New Fictions for a New Era" (2022)

"We are in a new age, and we need a new story. We need a story that will tell us who we are at this time in history, that includes all the new things we have learned, that tries to be more complete and doesn't leave anybody out."

Public consultation with Waterloo Region residents and industry experts will help staff to develop a new interpretive plan and programming that will represent, resonate with, engage and inspire our community. Using community input, staff will explore new stories and perspectives, with a better understanding of what has previously been left out, and how adding those stories may shine a different light on Waterloo Region's changing relationship with the wider world. Through community input, staff will continue to draw threads from our past, to today and towards the future to help our community make sense of where we are and go from here.

Staff are engaging local historians and experts and consultants in the field to explore how we integrate different stories, bringing along our traditional audiences and staff with new stories.

Staff will also review best practices at museums across the globe that have reviewed and iterated on their interpretive plan and programming to better represent their communities more holistically.

6. Communication and Engagement with Area Municipalities and the Public

Area Municipalities: The project team, facilities and the successful contractor will consult with and complete all necessary compliance and permit requirements for the City of Kitchener and the Grand River Conservation Authority. Local area museums will be consulted during the development of the new interpretation plan for Doon Heritage Village.

Public: Friends of the Waterloo Region museum have been kept updated with plans and continue to provide input. Staff are planning multiple community engagement initiatives throughout the construction period to get community feedback.

7. Financial Implications:

A report planned for Council on December 13, 2023 will outline the construction costs and funding requirements.

8. Conclusion / Next Steps:

The renewed site will facilitate more accessible public programs, more efficient lighting for safer evening and winter events, more reliable and sustainable heating to buildings to support year-round programming, new water mains for washrooms and fire response, and more reliable connectivity. Community and expert consultation will inform the re-opening and renewed programming and operating model of the site. This project will ensure that the village can grow into the future and provide even better innovative, relevant and immersive experiences for Waterloo Region's growing community.

9. Attachments:

Nil

Prepared By: Julian Kingston, Manager, Region of Waterloo Museums and Archives

Hilary Abel, Manager, Communications & Community Engagement

Reviewed By: Helen Chimirri-Russell, Director, Cultural Services

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