



January 21, 2019

Members of the Public Works Committee
Hamilton City Hall
2nd floor - 71 Main Street West
Hamilton, ON L8P 4Y5

Dear Councillors,

The following document comprises our report on the progress The Friends of the Aviary (FOA), a not-for-profit charitable organization supported by the City of Hamilton for 90 years, has made since they were advised to re-home our closed flock of 17 avian species. We will report on the relocation status, operational updates, current finances, as well as our proposal for the Aviary's future. We ask that the Public Works Committee consider the information provided, while working in conjunction with Friends of the Aviary, in order to decide what is best for the birds in question.

The package provided includes two parts. The first is an update on our progress and accomplishments since our last meeting, while the second part details our proposed location and strategies for the Aviary. Given the tight time frame allowed for the actual presentation, we thought it would be important to provide a more detailed report for committee members to read prior to the presentation and prepare their questions ahead of time.

We thank you for taking the time to read the report and for giving us the opportunity to present our strategies to the Public Works Committee.

Sincerely,

Friends of the Aviary,
Board of Directors

Sherry Houston, President
Melanie Suchecki, Vice President
Kimberly O'Hare, Treasurer
Claire Heffernan, Secretary
Tom Priestly, Director
Marissa Casale, Director
Kelly Curtis, Director

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Background

The Hamilton Aviary was first opened and operated by the City of Hamilton, at Dundurn Castle. At 90 years old, it is believed to be the oldest public Aviary in North America.

Since 1992, the Aviary has been managed by the non-profit, entirely volunteer run organization Friends of the Aviary, that, with the support of the City of Hamilton and Royal Botanical Gardens, has resided in the RBG's former Teaching Gardens since 1996. The building was retrofitted for the new residents, with the plan of relocating to at some point in the future. Nonetheless, the volunteers settled the Flock and began to build up their educational programs and foster new relationships with the public.

In October 2017, it was abruptly decided by the city, which had previously supported the aviary since 1927, that Friends of the Aviary will be closed and the birds rehomed in January 2018. The explanation given was related to OSPCA orders to improve the lighting for the birds and initiate a pest management program that went ignored under previous board governance. At that point, poor governance and lack of volunteers were also among the issues being faced by the organization, leaving the future of the Aviary and the birds in a precarious position.

With a new legally elected board, committed to ensuring the best practices in bird care and keeping the flock together, the Friends of the Aviary was given 9 months, which was then extended to 15 months, to secure a new home for the flock. Good governance practices, and increased volunteer recruitment, has greatly improved the environment of the Aviary and bird health. Fundraising and awareness has also increased dramatically.

In the following pages we report on accomplishments of the board of directors and our volunteers over the past 15 months since our initial discussion with the City of Hamilton in October of 2017.

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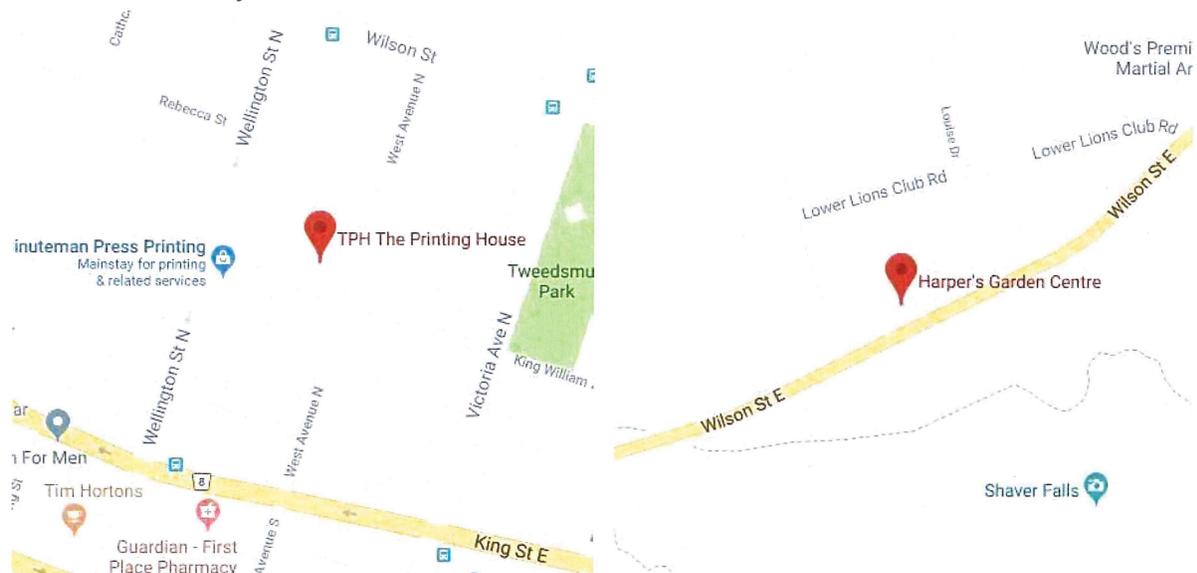
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Relocation Efforts

Finding a new location has been a top priority for the Board of Directors which necessitated the creation of Location Committee whose members included a real estate professional. The following criteria were identified that the space would need to successfully house the birds:

- An open space of at least 2,000 square feet to house the bird's cages
- A functional kitchen, a washroom and storage area
- Access to parking for our volunteers and members of the public
- Publicly accessible (near public transit)
- Wheelchair and stroller accessible for the public
- Large or plentiful windows for natural light
- Access to an outdoor space for the birds
- Proper zoning
- Permanent or long term

While we thoroughly explored 7 locations within the City of Hamilton, the best options that satisfied many of the criteria were **The Printing House** (43 West Avenue N, Hamilton, ON L8L 5C1) and **Harper's Greenhouse** (1039 Wilson Street East, Ancaster, ON L9H 5E3), both of which were willing to cooperate with FOA and very generously offered the use of the space at no cost. In spite of their incredible willingness to support the birds, neither location is able to serve as a suitable new home to Friends of the Aviary.



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The Printing House initially had issues in terms of zoning, at the time, it was legal non-conforming. While we understand that the zoning on this location has since been revised, the remaining barriers make it unlikely that birds would thrive. The location also has a lack of parking, and is situated in a dense residential area where noise from the birds could potentially disturb nearby residents. Additionally, we estimated that it would cost approximately \$20,000 to make the space livable for the flock and functional for the care and cleaning work of volunteers.

The single largest concern with Harpers Greenhouse, is that there is currently no running water to the space they were willing to set FOA up in, and the greenhouse would be very difficult to keep warm in the winter. It is a small space and not ideal for public access as we would be at the back of the property.

In addition to the two locations noted above, multiple commercial/retail properties were explored in the City. Concerns from potential Landlords include:

- the inability to provide insight into FOA's past and future financial credibility given the short amount of time the current Board of Directors has been in place
- concerns with the high number of animals on their property
- worries about neighbouring properties and the possible complaints from businesses and residents given the noise of the birds

In the end, the greatest deterrent to successfully establishing the Aviary at any of these locations is the high cost of converting the space, as well as the ongoing monthly costs of rent/lease, plus utilities.

Throughout this process, we have approached various Councillors for assistance in our search for a suitable home. Former Ward 3 Councillor Matthew Green invited the Relocation Committee to meet and had a great discussion about the needs of our birds and potential locations within the City. We also had similar discussions with Maureen Wilson, Jason Farr, Terry Whitehead and John Paul Danko in our search for a new location. **We greatly appreciate the time taken on behalf of the Councillors, past and present to support Friends of the Aviary during this tumultuous time.**

Operational Updates

Friends of the Aviary's volunteers continue to provide the best possible care to all our birds, **365 days of the year**. This includes detailed procedures for daily feeding, cleaning and maintenance of the bird's environment in accordance with the training and information provided by our avian veterinarian, visits to other aviaries, and input from our OSPCA inspector. This was a rigorous and lengthy process deployed to ensure that our new and seasoned volunteers find our care strategies easy to follow so that the birds benefit by getting the best care possible.

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The previous orders given by the OSPCA, in August of 2017, were addressed and resolved by November 2017 to the satisfaction of OSPCA inspector, Nicole Foster and our Avian veterinary Dr. Shannon Lee. New policies, procedures and training have been implemented to prevent a relapse into such unfavourable conditions again.

Administratively, FOA has re-established committees to oversee: our Relocation Efforts, Health & Enrichment, Education and Outreach, and Marketing & Fundraising. Our Board of Directors has worked hard to return FOA's leadership back to a respected, stable source of guidance for the organization to the benefit of the birds, the volunteers, donors and members of the public.

Since January 1, 2018 we have interviewed over 100 new volunteers with up to 10 new members joining every month. Our volunteers come from all over Hamilton and the surrounding areas to offer their time in the daily care of the birds to planning events and doing tours. We have a wide range of members including high school students getting their volunteer hours and McMaster students interested in veterinary medicine. We have developed a guidebook and training regime to ensure consistency and professionalism when onboarding new volunteers. We have a volunteer dedicated to interviewing new volunteers and assigning them to shifts where they are most needed.

Financial Updates and Plans

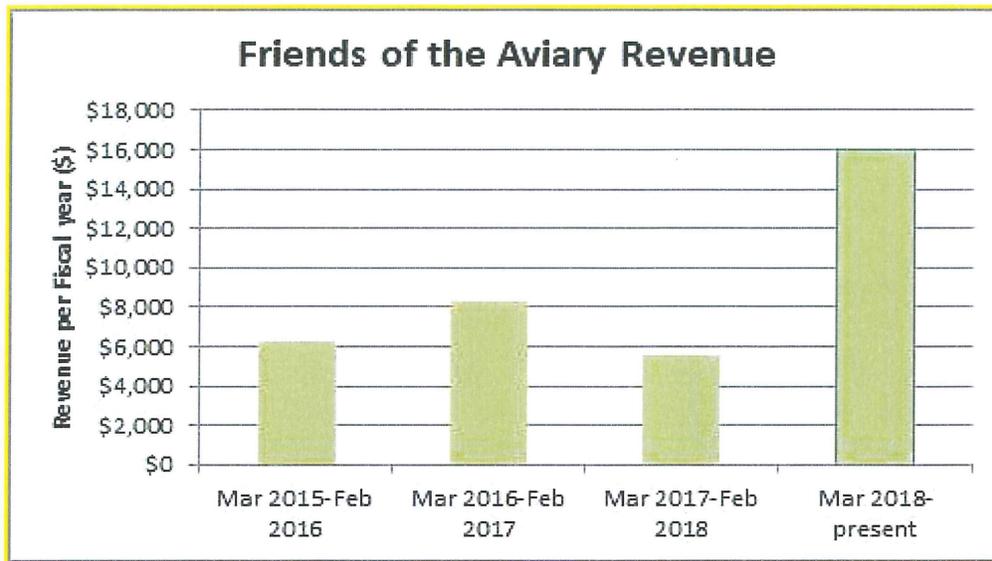
The Friends of the Aviary have devised a new budget to assume full financial responsibility of the expenses that are covered by the City of Hamilton's funding. This correlates directly with our fundraising efforts and ensures that we are fully aware of what our operational, administrative and fundraising costs will be moving forward. We have been recording supplies and services received by the city and are including these estimates into our budget. We are conservatively estimating that the total cost to run the Aviary completely independent will be roughly \$100,000 annually. This includes the hypothetical costs of rent, food, supplies, utilities, vet care, a programmer and associated maintenance.

Thus far in our current fiscal year (Mar 2018 to Feb 2019) we have raised significantly more than the last three fiscals. While this is an incredible and much needed infusion into our revenue streams, we are still a long way from an annual revenue goal of \$100,000. One of the major barriers to our application for funding grants is our inability to say whether the money will be used for repair and upgrades to our current location or to fund a new location and the repairs and updates that might be required to make a new home suitable for an Aviary. Funders are understandably wary of giving without a detailed plan for use of the monies provided. Many grants that we wanted to apply for had deadlines that were within a few months of receiving our deadline extension from the city. As the board necessarily focused their efforts on searching for a new location, bird care and volunteer recruitment, resources were unavailable to devote to these efforts.

We will continue to expand our fundraising efforts in order to rally more support from the community and to push Friends of the Aviary into a greater state of financial independence in the future.

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Revenue sources include: Open houses, Private Tours, Donations (Private and Canada Helps), Events, and organized Fundraisers.

Marketing, Fundraising and Events Committee accomplishments

- Rebranding with a new logo, website and mission statement
- Public awareness including a video production
[\(Click Here to View the Video\)](#)
- Media Relations including interviews on Cable 14 City Matters, Mohawk Radio “The Hawk,” and CHCH Morning Live, in addition to editorial items in The Hamilton Spectator.
- Attended the following events: Festival of Friends, Tesla Electric city Festival, Locke Street Festival, visits to 3 Pet Valu stores, RBG Artisan Fair, Raptorfest
- Organized the following fundraisers: Plant Nite, Comedy night at L’etranger, Doors open Hamilton, Karaoke night, The Hamilton Bulldogs ticket raffle.
- Hosted Private tours to the following: Calvin Christian School, Woodview-Mountain (HWDSB Section 23), Ontario Early years, Sparks, Beavers, YES club with RBG, Meadowland Adult Day Services, Canadian council of the Blind, Little Smiles daycare, YMCA camp Burlington, Delta High school and small family groups.
- Best Feathered Friend Campaign
- Successful “Giving Tuesday” campaign with Canada Helps
- Creating partnerships with Hamilton Public Library Reading buddies, Friends 4 Kindness and Special Needs Resource Centre

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Proposed Course of Action

We propose to remain at 85 Oak Knoll Drive to provide a safe and enriching home for Hamilton's parrots.

We will commit to raising and providing funds to upgrade the current building condition to make it aesthetically pleasing and adhere to safety codes. We would like to remain open "by donation" to the public every weekend and continue building our community programs with the Hamilton Library, seniors centres, special needs groups, and students at risk, as well as helping and high school students achieve volunteer hours.

We have already reached out to The Westdale children's school and the Churchill park community gardens to inquire about the possibility in sharing a greenhouse year round. This partnership could lead to re-establishing the children's garden and making the location more attractive for all citizens.

This unique location, surrounded by forest trails with a diverse wild bird population, will be ideal for creating our Educational program that uses the "think global, act local" concept by making connections between global habitat loss and exotic species-at-risk and how the same issues affect us and our native species on a local level.

Our fundraising goals are to become financially independent from the City of Hamilton within 3-5 years reducing funding requests year over year.

Current Barriers to our Proposed option

- Condition of building is deteriorated and unsightly- we are unable to justify charging admission
- Building access: Gate is a physical and psychological barrier to entry-difficult for people with mobility issues to enter. The closed gate makes it difficult for people to know when we are open.
- Poor visibility of location from street views.
- Poor Communication-Our attempts at getting answers or offering suggestions have been often gone unnoticed and unanswered
- Public Awareness is very low. A concerted effort at marketing and media and public relations, combined with consistent attention to and presence on social media are necessary.
- Entirely Volunteer Run-in order to ensure we have volunteers available for events, educational programs and training we need to have a reliable staff member skilled at programming. Our current volunteer resources for these areas are limited, despite increased volunteer numbers.
- Uncertain future prevents us from applying for grants- knowing where we will be for the next few years will provide security and assurance to potential funders
- Current agreement constrains the Friends of the Aviary from achieving some goals
- Outdated bylaws require board members to be volunteers, for at least one year, which has led to a "hands-on" less experienced board that has limited our success.

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Success solutions to overcome barriers

- Permission for the Friends of the Aviary to pay for immediate building upgrades which include: new windows, doors, enclosures and kitchen updates. Aesthetic upgrades will allow for us to charge for tours.
 - Permission for the Friends of the Aviary to fundraise for larger scale projects (ceiling and greenhouse) which will be pre-approved by the City of Hamilton and Royal Botanical Gardens
 - Moving the public access to the south side of the building to increase accessibility and be closer to the parking lot and to align with the new crushed gravel pathway that is part of the Churchill Park Master Plan.
 - Regular updates or meetings could help with communication.
 - Partnership with Tourism Hamilton would be beneficial for both organizations as we would align our goals to achieve greater success with becoming a unique attraction.
 - Increase Public awareness with support from Tourism Hamilton and a Media professional.
 - Current agreement would need to be updated to allow the hiring of a programmer/director to continue our success
 - Find homes for the parrots who are suitable to be rehomed
 - Our proposed income stream will lead to financial independence
 - Admission and membership fees once building is upgraded (\$12,000)
 - Gift shop (\$15,000)
 - Private parties and events (\$20,000)
 - Education and Public Programming (?)
 - Corporate Sponsorships (\$30 000)
 - Funding grants (\$20,000)*
 - Training and Re-homing birds (\$20,000)
- * This number is dependent upon Friends of the Aviary being awarded grants from multiple organizations and may be higher or lower depending upon favourable reception of our submissions.
- Update our Bylaws at the next AGM to remove constraints on board of director requirements now that we are moving towards a more skills based and community involved direction.

We believe that the current board of directors has established their ability to successfully take on enormous challenges. They have had to overcome steep learning curves to become proficient in all areas of volunteer recruitment and management, accounting and budgeting, maintaining charity and corporate status, searching for a suitable new home, fundraising, marketing, communicating to city staff and the public..... all the while ensuring the best daily care for the birds. This board of directors is proud of the amount of work we have accomplished, even with our limited experience. However, we must acknowledge that even greater progress will be made once we able to attract and vote in leaders from our community to join the FOA board of directors. These successes could not have been possible without the incredible support from caring citizens all over southern Ontario. We are a vital part of the community and we believe in our potential to become an exciting and unique historical attraction for visitors and citizens.

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Conclusion

“Culture makes a significant and positive impact on a community’s quality of life. I have witnessed cultural revitalization taking place across Hamilton – much of which has been led by the community – and, I recognized that the power of culture to transform a community would only be increased if the City did more to facilitate its development.”

--Tim McCabe, General Manager and Sponsor, City of Hamilton 2013 Cultural Plan

The Hamilton Aviary is a part of the cultural heritage of the city. It is fondly remembered by generations, from its origins at Dundurn Castle. It is a significant part of the history of the City of Hamilton, the oldest public Aviary in North America, and fits perfectly within the guidelines of the City’s Cultural Plan.

Our history does not allow us to claim to be an historic “site,” as we have been in limbo since our departure from Dundurn Castle. Nonetheless, the Aviary is an historic institution in the city.

As such, we believe that the city risks losing a significant cultural and historic asset unless it allows Friends of the Aviary sufficient time to plan a transition from a city-supported and funded not-for-profit, to a sustainable, self-sufficient organization. The city’s support would allow us to conserve and enhance this gem of our cultural heritage and serve the citizens of Hamilton with our goal of public education through community partnerships and engagement. It would also become another reason for visitors to stay and explore in Hamilton.

This board of directors seeks to address all of these issues through member-approved changes to the board structure, city-approved changes to our ability to pursue new revenue streams, addition of at least one full time staff member to act as executive director and deliver public programs and a reprieve of 3 to five years in order to develop and institute a sustainable funding plan.

Despite the challenges, Friends of the Aviary remains committed to restoring The Hamilton Aviary to its former status as an educational Avian facility, that is a significant value to both our residents, and to visitors.

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