



Essex Region Conservation



Creating a Heritage Hub



Essex Region
Conservation Foundation
enriching the place for life

Great news - BIG things are happening in Harrow along County Road 50!

Dear Valued Partners and Neighbours:

We are very excited to share some big news! The John R. Park Homestead will be building a much-needed Heritage Centre. As you know, the Homestead welcomes over 14,000 visitors annually (4,000 visitors alone for the March Maple Syrup Festival). This climate-controlled classroom, gift shop and exhibition space will include accessible and adequate washroom facilities will allow us to continue to conduct our ever-growing education programs, and be enhanced as a Heritage Hub.

For those of you who have visited the John R. Park Homestead, it is clear that our existing Visitor Centre is severely limited in its ability to meet our present school programming needs. It features only one indoor climate controlled space. Schools will often bring 60 – 90 students, as they need to be cost effective and fill their buses, and our current classroom area can only seat 30 students auditorium style (20 at tables). The facility is aging and washroom facilities are far too limited to meet the needs for important education programs and special events. The current facility has only two female washroom stalls, and one male washroom stall. As the facilities were created approximately 40 years ago, they are not wheelchair accessible and do not meet current codes for full accessibility. The site also does not have a 'family' washroom to accommodate various uses including, but not limited to, adults who require special assistance and families with additional privacy or other needs.

Construction of the new facility will enhance the visitor/student experience and serve as a Tourism/Cultural Hub, providing an enhanced tourism experience for guests that will better highlight many incredible places of interest along County Rd. 50 and within the County of Essex. We welcome many guests annually and are always promote the many wineries, restaurants and other unique businesses along the route. Along with the unified visitor experience, our staff will be able to better welcome guests and ensure they have information about the many other places to visit nearby! The Homestead's gift shop, which is currently limited due to the constraints of the historic buildings, will also be expanded as part of this experience. The gift shop features local handmade goods by local crafters and artisans, but its lack of climate control limits the number of partner products that we can highlight.

The new Heritage Centre is intended to accommodate between 60 – 90 students seated assembly style. An enhanced welcoming tourism hub will also allow us to exhibit additional tourism materials referring guests to you, our valuable partners. With accessibility standards met, the enlarged classroom will allow us to bring in additional heritage exhibits – such as travelling exhibits from the ROM, which will further attract tourists and visitors to our collective County Road 50 destinations.

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We wanted to reach out directly to you to identify the scope of what our new Heritage Centre will include, as it has come to our attention that some misunderstanding about our intentions exists. None of the existing Heritage buildings on the site will be demolished. Our intent for this new building is to meet our school programming and heritage/tourism needs. We have neither the capacity, desire, nor ability to compete with our private sector partners to offer wedding and banquet facilities – the experiences that you are offering in this regard are second to none! The new Heritage Centre will seat 60 – 90 students assembly style, which translate to approximately a maximum capacity of 40 – 60 individuals seated at tables. As well, the new Heritage Centre will not include a catering kitchen, nor will it be licenced for alcoholic beverages. It will also, of course, be in compliance with all regulatory requirements.

The Homestead currently hosts between 3 – 5 wedding ceremonies annually. While we receive some requests to host receptions, we strongly recommend that couples choose another business along County Road 50 for their receptions, as we are simply not set up to do so, and we advise that there are many beautiful facilities nearby that are far better positioned and prepared to host large events. This will continue as our practice. The rentals that we offer are generally tied to the unique experiences offered at the John R. Park Homestead – for instance – meetings of Heritage organizations, some birthday parties for children who are passionate about history and pioneer times or small family gatherings for those whom the Homestead is a special place etc. We have also partnered with organizations to utilize the classroom (at no charge) to teach English to migrant workers, and with the Multicultural Council of Windsor-Essex to offer experiences to new Canadians.

Museums and conservation areas educate, inform and delight...they preserve our history and welcome us with stories told in their natural settings. A visit to the Homestead takes you back in time to the 1850s, where the original house and farm buildings of John and Amelia Park have been restored to bring the 19th century to life. Our intent in building our new Heritage Centre is to continue to serve the children of Windsor and Essex County, visitors drawn to explore our history, and our many valued partners like you in this capacity.

We hope this letter provides some clarity as to what this exciting opportunity will provide – and what it will not. Should you have any questions or have any further information, we would welcome you to contact us at any time. Once again, we value our partners and neighbours along County Road 50, and look forward to continuing to work together to highlight the collective experiences we all offer.

Sincerely,

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