

Poet Laureate Program Review

Barrie Arts Advisory Committee

Tuesday, December 5, 2023

investbarrie



History

On August 31, 2010, the Department of Culture announced to City Council via Memo that it was creating a Poet Laureate Program with the position being nominated by the people of Barrie:

“The Poet Laureate... will serve as a literary ambassador and champion for poetry, language and the arts and will by their presence and their public readings deepen the tone and significance of civic occasions”.



History

The criteria and nomination process was created by a committee of individuals that included:

- High school English teachers,
- The Executive Director of the Barrie Public Library, and
- The Professor of Literature at the University Partnership Centre at Georgian College.

The committee worked with Department of Culture staff to develop the program.

Nomination Process

Currently, nominations for the Poet Laureate position are received every four years during the Barrie Arts Awards nominations period with the following information collected for each nominee:

- A list of accomplishments, awards or recognition relevant to the nomination
- A list of published works and/or performance appearances
- A sample of the nominee's work
- A brief biography highlighting the contribution the nominee intends to make to the community in the position of Poet Laureate
- A letter of recommendation from a member of the arts community



Bruce Meyer, Barrie's first Poet Laureate

Adjudication Process

Nominees are scored by an adjudication panel made up of a Chief Librarian or library CAO, another community's Poet Laureate, a Culture Development staff from another municipality and one or two individuals that represent the publishing industry. Nominees must be current residents of Barrie with no intention to move during the Poet Laureate term and are scored on the degree to which they:

- Have published their works in any variety of media
- Demonstrate their skill in rhetoric, grammar and language
- Have presented their work at public events or forums
- Have received awards or other public recognition for their work; and,
- Demonstrate excellence in poetry and the literary arts.



Damian Lopes, Barrie's second Poet Laureate

Victoria Butler, Barrie's third Poet Laureate

Role of the Poet Laureate

To raise the profile of the literary arts by:



Writing and publishing poetry



Performing poetry



Educating the public on the value of poetry and the literary arts



Encouraging and celebrating other local poets and writers



Promoting literacy in all age groups



Role of the Poet Laureate

The Poet Laureate acts as a literary ambassador for the City of Barrie.

It is the intent of the program to create a legacy of written and spoken poetry in the community for each Barrie Poet Laureate through ongoing engagement with residents and those in the literary arts to ensure that the artform continues to exist and providing an avenue for expression amongst the community.

Poet Laureate Responsibilities

Program Requirements:

1. Appear at key City of Barrie events and celebrations including (minimum of 3):
 - a) The Barrie Arts Awards,
 - b) National Poetry Month; and
 - c) Culture Days
2. Provide a brief annual report (at the end of each year during their term) outlining the activities undertaken in the Poet Laureate role (event appearances, workshops, published works, etc.)
3. Participate in the nomination or selection of the next Poet Laureate upon completion of their term

Governance Requirements:

1. To adhere and agree to operate under the terms of the City of Barrie's Code of Conduct
2. To perform duties with honesty and integrity and ensure that conduct in person, and online is professional and aligned with the Ontario Human Rights Code
3. To obtain approval of the Economic and Creative Development Department before using the City of Barrie logo on any promotional or print materials related to their position

City Supports for the Program

The City of Barrie provides:

1. A webpage dedicated to the Poet Laureate Program on which the current Poet Laureate is profiled, with links to their work
2. An annual platform from which the Poet Laureate may present their original work (i.e. Barrie Arts Awards or similar)
3. Promotion of major career highlights of the current Poet Laureate on appropriate City social media channels, where appropriate (ex. awards won, new publications, etc.)
4. \$1,000.00 annual stipend to the Poet Laureate to support their work in the role

*While some updates to strengthen clarification of the role have been implemented in recent years, a thorough benchmarking exercise had not been undertaken, so the stipend amount has not changed since program inception.

Current Poet Laureate

Since being crowned in 2022, Tyneisha Thomas has embraced the role of Poet Laureate and has been delivering programs beyond the scope of the position. Through these events she is introducing new audiences to the diversity that exists within the literary arts. Specifically, Tyneisha has participated in events including:

- Monthly open mics,
- Workshops at the Barrie Public Library,
- Word Up, the former local writers' event series, and
- Culture Days programming hosted by the MacLaren Art Centre
- Flag raisings at City Hall

She has hosted several Rap is Poetry events around Simcoe County, represented Barrie at events around the region and engaged with other Poets Laureate through the League of Canadian Poets. This fall, Tyneisha represented Barrie with performances at RISE, at a gathering of Poets Laureate in Windsor, and at the Ontario Tourism Summit.

While Invest Barrie has been able to provide some support for a small number of programs, there is not a budget or directive to be able to financially support all of the initiatives.

Current Poet Laureate

Through her exposure to the Poet Laureate community, Tyneisha Thomas has advocated that the stipend and overall funding support for programming is not current with municipal best practice.

Given that the program has not been reviewed since its inception, staff have undertaken a benchmarking activity of communities with Poet Laureate programs. Staff identified 37 communities in Canada with a publicly promoted Poet Laureate Program. Of those, we obtained key program details from 27 municipalities, including program goals, annual stipend, term length, roles and responsibilities, and selection process and criteria. The summary is attached in Appendix 'A' to this presentation.

Benchmark Review

Key benchmarking data:

- Average honorarium across small-midsize communities (less than 500,000 ppl): \$2,939
- Highest honorarium (less than 500,000 ppl): \$5,000.00 (St. John's, Fredericton, Surrey, Halifax)
- Lowest honorarium (less than 500,000 ppl): \$500.00 (Greater Sudbury, Coburg)
- Project/event/travel funding where listed: \$200.00 - \$1,500.00
- 52% of municipal Poet Laureate Programs have a term of two years; 26% have a four-year term.

Common program expectations:

- Creating new, original works (1-4 poems) about the municipality that can be used as the municipality sees fit,
- Developing and delivering poetry workshops,
- Developing a legacy project during their term, and
- Hosting literary events.

Review Findings

Comparing similar/nearby Ontario municipalities:

- Kingston, Windsor, Collingwood, and Mississauga
- The annual stipend for Poets Laureates from these municipalities ranges from \$2,350-\$5000
- Each of these municipalities' programs have additional roles and responsibilities beyond Barrie's current program

Municipality	Annual Stipend	Key Roles/ Responsibilities
Collingwood	\$3,500	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create and deliver workshops of projects to engage residents and develop new poets and writers • Initiate one project that will leave a lasting contribution to the community • Produce new original works that reflect the town • Participate or perform at literary and cultural events (suggested four per year) • Prepare and provide a yearly written report of activities
Kingston	\$2,350	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write one new, original poem each year that reflects on life in the city • Read poem on occasion of Mayor's annual New Year's Day Levee • Give the City limited license to publish poems • Read poetry at a minimum of three select public events
Mississauga	\$5,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create work that reflects values of the city and its citizens • Produce at least three original works for specific events identified by the City in each year • Perform readings to City Council during National Poetry Month and at two other official City events each year, with poems sent to City staff in advance • Attend a variety of civic events to promote and attract people to the literary world • Act as a mentor for the Youth Poet Laureate by assisting them in creating an event/project to promote literary arts to young people
Windsor	\$2,500	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create work that reflects city's people, places, sites, identity, and life • Produce at least three original works for specific events identified by the city • Make public presentations of their work at least three times a year • Work with City administration to produce at least one poetry event a year • Participate in literary life of the city to raise visibility of literary arts • Be willing to mentor the Youth Poet Laureate

Staff Recommendations

Based upon the goals of the program, deliverables asked of the Laureate, and the benchmarking exercise, the following changes would strengthen alignment with other municipal practices in 2024.

1. Increase in the annual stipend from \$1,000.00 to \$2,500.00 per year
2. An additional \$1,500.00 per year for a poetry event(s) or project(s) to be coordinated and led by the Poet Laureate and preapproved by Economic and Creative Development in alignment with the goals of the Department, and City Council. Eligible and pre-approved expenses will be reimbursed through the Department.
3. Up to \$250.00 per year in travel expenses related to kilometre reimbursement at the City rate.

Additional Program Requirements

Additional roles and responsibilities of the Poet Laureate to be added to the Terms of Reference:

1. Organize one event or project aimed at increasing awareness of and involvement in the literary arts per year. This project should align with Council Strategic Priorities and must be preapproved by the Economic and Creative Development Department. Expenses must fit pre-determined eligibility criteria as communicated by the City and will be reimbursed upon delivery of receipts.
2. b) Write one new piece of work that can be used by the City to promote the program and the community (with rights given to the City to use as it sees fit).

Financial Implications

- The current budgeted amount for the Poet Laureate program is \$1,000.
- The costs associated with the stipend increase and project budget, an increase of \$3,250 per year, has not been included in the 2024 Business Plan.
- If recommended and adopted by Council, the additional funds would need be added to the 2024 Budget for Economic and Creative Development.
- No additional staff resources will be required to implement the recommendation.

Next Steps

Should the Arts Advisory Committee support changes to the program, a Motion would be required to be brought forward to Council.

Sample Recommended Motion

1. That the additions to the Poet Laureate Terms of Reference as presented on slide 15 of the Presentation to the Arts Advisory Committee dated November 28th, 2023, be accepted for the term of the current Poet Laureate, with annual reporting to Council via memo of program activities.
2. That the annual stipend for the Poet Laureate be increased to \$2,500 with an additional \$1,500 provided annually to fund a poetry-focused public event or community poetry project, hosted by the current Poet Laureate, and up to \$250 provided for kilometre reimbursement for travel related to serving the Poet Laureate role with pre-approval being given by the Economic and Creative Development Department.

Thank you!

investbarrie