

This meeting of the Heritage Toronto Board was held on December 10, 2025, from 6:00-7:30 pm at Heritage Toronto's offices at 157 King Street East.

PRESENT: Liza Chalaidopoulos (Chair)
Dilys Chan
Councillor Stephen Holyday
Jeff Junke
Suzanne Kavanagh
Melissa Nugegoda
Peter Ignazi
Christopher Castellano
Andrew Himmel

REGRETS: James Lane
Councillor Kandavel
Colin Smillie
Bradley Evoy
Hana Syed
Harmeet Singh Sandhu

ALSO PRESENT: Allison Bain, Executive Director
Chris Bateman, Plaques Manager
Laura Carlson, Public Programs Manager
Lucy Di Pietro, Marketing and Digital Media Manager
Light Naing, Marketing and Communications Coordinator
Mitchie Ding, Public Programs Coordinator
Nadia Sule, Operations Coordinator (recording)

A. OPENING REMARKS, AGENDA, AND MINUTES

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Chair Liza Chalaidopoulos at 5:58 p.m.

2. Acknowledgement of Traditional Territory

Liza C. delivered an Indigenous land acknowledgement to open the meeting.

3. Introduction and Opening Remarks by Chair

Liza C. thanked Board and staff members for their work over the past year and provided a brief overview of upcoming Board restructuring. She emphasized the importance of full Board participation in year-end donations, noting that only eight Board members contributed to date, and encouraged all members to make a donation.

4. Approval of Agenda

HT 25-XX: APPROVAL OF AGENDA for the December 10, 2025, Board Meeting of Heritage Toronto.

(carried)

Moved by Councillor Stephen Holyday, seconded by Peter Ignazi, and approved unanimously.

5. Declarations of Confidentiality and Conflicts of Interest

No conflicts of interest were declared. Liza C. reminded members that all materials and discussions at the Board meeting are confidential.

6. Approval of Minutes of the Previous Board Meeting

HT 25-XX: APPROVAL OF MINUTES of the meeting of the board of Heritage Toronto held September 17, 2025.

(carried)

Moved by Jeff Junke, seconded by Suzanne Kavanagh and approved unanimously.

B. CONSENT AGENDA

HT 25-XX: APPROVAL OF CONSENT AGENDA

(carried)

Moved by Peter Ignazi, seconded by Dilys Chan and approved unanimously.

C. REPORTS

1. CHAIR OF THE BOARD

Ms. Chalaidopoulos provided no further remarks beyond those made in her opening statement.

2. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Executive Director Allison Bain introduced Nadia, a new staff member supporting Operations. She announced staffing transitions, noting that Laura, Roshni, and Selma are no longer with Heritage Toronto. Recruitment will begin shortly for two new positions supporting Tours and Awards.

Councillor Holyday acknowledged the organization's mentorship of Selma and commented on her professional development.

Ms. Chalaidopoulos read aloud a card from Selma addressed to the Board.

3. EXECUTIVE, FINANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE

A. Bain reported the following highlights on behalf of James Lane:

- Plaque revenues are projected to exceed budget.
- Tour revenues remain strong, with over \$33,000 in ticket sales—the highest on record.
- Significant growth is seen in private tours and donations.
- Sponsorship for Tours and Awards has reached record levels; TD drawdown funds have been received.
- Some sponsorship revenue will be deferred to 2026 to complete equity-related programming.
- Marketing expenses increased due to digital advertising and website modernization.

Suzanne Kavanagh asked about private tour pricing; Ms. Bain confirmed a flat-rate model with per-person charges.

There were no further questions.

3. DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Suzanne suggested offering gift cards for Heritage Toronto events as a meaningful option for individuals who “have everything.”

She praised the 50th Awards celebration, noting that it was a strong event despite staffing shortages and close timing. Suzanne again encouraged full Board donation participation, noting that 100% participation reflects positively on the organization.

4. STAFF REPORT

Ms. Bain reviewed accomplishments for the year:

- Over 6,000 attendees participated in in-person programming, nearing pre-pandemic levels.
- Public and private tour attendance increased, while community event attendance declined.
- Audience demographic benchmarking was piloted.
- Heritage Toronto delivered its largest program budget and highest plaque revenue to date.
- The organization now employs 10 full-time staff.

She thanked staff for their support in delivering core programming and contributing to the agency’s growth.

Chris Bateman reported that plaques now incorporate equity-focused narratives. The Conrad the Raccoon plaque received significant media attention and generated 4,000 website visits through its QR code.

When asked by Peter Ignazi about the purpose of QR codes, Christopher explained that they help measure public engagement with plaques.

Melissa Nugedoda inquired whether QR codes will be standard on future plaques; Christopher noted that long-term maintenance could be challenging, though sticker-based alternatives are being explored.

Peter also asked about opportunities for media coverage of Century House plaques during the holiday season, and Christopher confirmed there is typically increased interest at that time and during the spring.

Councillor Holyday expressed enthusiasm about public engagement with the Conrad plaque, particularly given its June installation in an area of heavy foot traffic

Heather Corner shared that Awards programming expanded this year, including the Round Room library and photographic composites. The ceremony opened with an Indigenous dance performance, which was very well received.

The donor appeal from the stage more than doubled last year's results. Despite a condensed planning period, the event was successful, and the 2026 Awards program will undergo a full review to identify opportunities for improvement.

Lucy DiPietro reported continued growth in both public and private tour attendance. Participation in community events, however, continues to decline despite being free to the public.

Liza asked whether community events would be reviewed. Lucy confirmed that Heritage Toronto will reassess where and with whom these events are delivered, as attendance has been decreasing at community events. Lucy also noted that although a marketing push supported this year's free community events, overall promotion remains lower than for paid tours.

Melissa asked whether alternative volunteer databases are being explored. Lucy confirmed that Eventbrite and Sling no longer meet program needs and that both paid and free platforms are being considered.

When asked who attends tours, Lucy explained that survey responses suggest a predominant demographic of women aged 55+, high-income, and Downtown Toronto-based, though the response rate was only 13%. Digital ads brought in new and more diverse participants this year which Heritage Toronto will continue to track.

Councillor Holyday recommended exploring partnerships with Destination Toronto and conference organizers, noting the strong visitor interest in Canadian cultural experiences.

Peter reinforced the importance of tourism partnerships, particularly with major events like FIFA 2026.

Christopher Bateman reported ongoing tracking of community partnerships and highlighted the intention to recruit a one-year contract Equity Coordinator, pending funding and renewed sponsorship commitments.

Lucy also explained how website performance exceeded all targets, and Instagram engagement reached record levels. The team is exploring new creative strategies to build audience reach.

Melissa asked about TikTok; staff explained that as a City-affiliated agency, Heritage Toronto follows City policy, which currently excludes TikTok. The team is instead exploring expanded content opportunities on YouTube. Email marketing continues to be the organization's most effective channel.

Councillor Holyday recommended collaborating with Toronto-focused content creators such as "NOTSMOOTHSTEVE." Lucy confirmed that the expanded marketing team is assessing opportunities for partnerships.

Christopher cautioned that influencer partnerships can pose significant financial and reputational risk for a small agency.

Peter suggested integrating fun facts from Equity Heritage Emerging Historians into the organization's social media strategy.

Heather Corner reported that tour sponsorship nearly doubled this year despite staffing gaps. Heather emphasized the goal of restoring 100% philanthropic participation among both staff and Board members.

The end of year donor and volunteer appreciation film screening event was successful and fostered strong engagement among donors and volunteers.

Heritage Toronto has secured its first confirmed sponsor for the 2026 Awards and Tours programs.

Allison concluded by noting key priorities for the coming year, including:

- Maintaining and enhancing the online plaque map
- Hiring an Equity Coordinator
- Reassessing and redesigning community events
- Completing 2026 plaque reviews
- Rebuilding donor participation and engagement
- Restoring staffing capacity within the Programs team

D. OTHER BUSINESS

1. BOARD MEETING DATES FOR 2026

HT 25-XX: APPROVAL OF 2026 BOARD MEETING DATES

(carried)

Moved by Christopher Castellano, seconded by Dilys Chan and approved unanimously

2. BOARD COMPOSITION AND RESTRUCTURING

Liza presented an update on the Board's restructuring initiative, highlighting that the intended outcomes include enhanced opportunities for meaningful Board engagement and a reduction in procedural bureaucracy.

With several Board terms concluding in February, the board asked members to indicate whether they intend to renew and to share feedback on the future Board and committee structure. Christopher, Dilys, Suzanne, and Jeff expressed interest in continuing.

The Board discussed options for a revised structure:

- Christopher recommended assigning departmental leads during the transition period to ensure oversight.
- Councillor Holyday emphasized the value of subcommittees on boards with substantial workloads and suggested recruiting members with expertise in marketing and fundraising.
- Jeff suggested maintaining a smaller number of committees and convening task forces as needed.
- Suzanne supported a smaller Board with an active Executive Committee, handling key oversight responsibilities such as audit and compensation.
- Melissa noted that more frequent Board meetings could reduce the need for standing committees.
- Peter expressed concern that committees limit opportunities to hear broader ideas; ad-hoc task forces may be more inclusive.
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Liza noted that meeting dates for next year are already set, so structural changes would likely take effect in 2027.

Allison emphasized that Board feedback aligns with staff perspective: a smaller Board allows for richer contributions in all areas and in marketing and fundraising especially.

Holyday raised questions regarding Secretariat selection criteria for new Board members; Allison confirmed that these guidelines may need updating

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 7:33pm.