



City of Richmond

Report to Committee

To: Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services Committee
From: Marie Fenwick
Director, Arts, Culture and Heritage Services
Date: November 3, 2025
File: 11-7141-01/2025-Vol 01
Re: Options for Maintaining Visitor Hours for London Farmhouse

Staff Recommendations

1. That Option 2, as outlined in the report "Options for Maintaining Visitor Hours for London Farmhouse", dated November 3, 2025, from the Director, Arts, Culture and Heritage Services be approved; and
2. That the Chief Administrative Officer and the General Manager, Parks, Recreation and Culture Division, be authorized to execute all documentation, including an amendment to the Operating Agreement as outlined in the report "Options for Maintaining Visitor Hours for London Farmhouse", dated November 3, 2025, from the Director, Arts, Culture and Heritage Services.

Marie Fenwick
Director, Arts, Culture and Heritage Services
(604-276-4288)

REPORT CONCURRENCE		
ROUTED TO:	CONCURRENCE	CONCURRENCE OF GENERAL MANAGER
Finance Department	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Transportation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Law	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
SENIOR STAFF REPORT REVIEW	INITIALS: 	APPROVED BY CAO

Staff Report

Origin

At the Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services Committee meeting held on September 17, 2025, the London Heritage Farm Society delegated to share information about the current operations at London Farm and to request that the City provide staffing to maintain visitor hours for the London Farmhouse. As a result of this delegation, staff received the following referrals:

That staff review the request of the London Heritage Farm Society and bring forward options for maintaining visitor hours for the London Farmhouse; and

That staff review opportunities to improve parking for London Farm.

The purpose of this report is to respond to these referrals.

This report supports the *Steveston Heritage Sites Interpretive Framework*, endorsed by Council on November 14, 2023, which identified the following interpretive goals for London Farm:

- Inspire connections to and stewardship of the land and the site;
- Create an environment of curiosity and remembering of early twentieth century farm life;
- Foster greater understanding of agricultural and farm practices of early twentieth century farming; and
- Encourage discovery of the people and complexity of Richmond's farm society.

This report supports Council's Strategic Plan 2022-2026 Focus Area #6 A Vibrant, Resilient and Active Community:

Vibrant, resilient and active communities supported by a wide variety of opportunities to get involved, build relationships and access resources.

6.1 Advance a variety of program, services, and community amenities to support diverse needs and interests and activate the community.

6.5 Enhance and preserve arts and heritage assets in the community.

Analysis

Background

The London Heritage Farm Society (Society) is a non-profit Society and Registered Charity. The Society has been involved with London Farm since working with the City to save the Farmhouse and for the creation of the park. London Farm opened to the public on February 14, 1980, and the Society has been involved in operating the site since that time. The Society's mission is to "provide visitors the opportunity to discover how the early Richmond pioneer farmers contributed to the development of Richmond, and to preserve London Farm".

For many decades the Society operated the site with a significant amount of independence. Society staff kept the site open to public, including maintaining visitor hours for the Farmhouse

and delivering a number of popular public programs. This was accomplished through the support of many dedicated volunteers, many of whom have now retired from their volunteer work. As regular volunteers have retired, the Society has begun to employ more staff to support their program work. Currently, the Society employs a part-time administrator, part-time programming staff and summer students. Volunteers still play a significant role in the delivery of events and caring for the park spaces with a contribution of more than 600 hours annually.

The City has a five-year operating agreement with the Society dated November 1, 2020, providing terms for the Society to support operations at London Farm. During this period, the Society has consistently provided many outstanding programs and services at London Farm, including:

- Caring for the chickens and maintaining the chicken coop;
- Managing the community allotment gardens;
- Caring for annual flower gardens and fruit trees;
- Providing tea service to public on a regular basis;
- Overseeing the apiary and collection of honey;
- Producing farm-themed events for public such a Family Farm Day and Country Fest;
- Managing a gift shop offering local, farm-themed items; and
- Coordinating site rentals.

The majority of revenue earned from programs, the gift shop, and fundraisers, goes towards program costs. According to the Society's annual financial statements, they have averaged an annual surplus of \$2,775 since 2018. These surpluses are used to purchase the equipment and for special projects that enhance the site. This has included installing an underground irrigation system in the perennial garden, planting a lavender garden, and purchasing a green house, compost bins, lawn tractors, appliances for the kitchen, and rental equipment. The Society strives to maintain a balanced budget each year and is in good financial standing, including maintaining a small contingency should something urgent arise.

While in the past the Society maintained visitor hours for the Farmhouse, in 2018, the Society underwent significant changes due to board and staff turnover. As a result of this, the Society closed the Farmhouse to public in 2019, and it remained closed through 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Following the pandemic, the Society expressed to staff that they did not have the capacity to maintain visitor hours at the Farmhouse and requested that City staff be responsible for these duties. The Society has indicated that they lack sufficient funding, volunteer board time and the expertise required to recruit, train and supervise the necessary staff. With surplus funding available due to reduced heritage site operations during the COVID-19 pandemic, the City was able to accommodate the costs of having a Head Customer Service Attendant seasonally at London Farm from 2022 through to 2025 to open the Farmhouse to public. These funds have now been depleted and there is no longer sufficient funding within existing budgets to support these hours.

The Farmhouse serves as the heart of the site, providing important interpretation of the London family and serving as home to the popular gift shop. When the Farmhouse is closed to the public, park visitors generally have little to no interaction with anyone serving as an ambassador for the

site, thereby missing important historical and site information. During poor weather seasons, there is not sufficient visitation to warrant staff presence in the Farmhouse. However, during the warmer months, visitors often seek entry to the house as a way to enhance their experience of the site. From 2023-2025, visitation from May to August averaged 4,000 people per year.

Options for Maintaining Visitor Hours for the London Farmhouse

Option 1 – On-going Funding for Visitor Hours

The City could provide 700 hours of staffing at the London Farmhouse between May 1 and Thanksgiving and for special event days outside of high season. These hours would be similar to those offered during 2024 and 2025.

This option is not recommended as there is not a clear understanding of what times and days for visitor hours would offer the greatest value to site visitors. It would also be helpful to have a clearer understanding of how the City and Society share responsibilities for delivering interpretation and supporting gift shop operations at the Farmhouse before entering an on-going commitment.

Additionally, the Society has expressed a willingness to provide a cash contribution to support the costs for maintaining visitor hours for the Farmhouse. However, they require additional time to determine a sustainable amount to contribute over a long-term period.

Cost: annual cost of \$31,000 (2026 wage rates) on an ongoing basis

Option 2 – One-Time funding for Visitor Hours (Recommended)

The City could provide 700 hours of staffing at the London Farmhouse between May 1 and Thanksgiving and for special event days outside of high season for a one-year pilot period for 2026. These hours would be similar to those offered in 2024 and 2025.

This option is recommended as it will allow time to fully understand the optimal days and hours for the house to be opened. In 2025, a new people counter was installed at the entrance to the site. Having data on general site visitation would allow for a clearer understanding of which days and hours would offer the most value for having the house open. This period would also allow time for the City and Society to develop a clearer understanding of the roles and responsibilities of City staff when they are present on site.

The current agreement with the Society expired October 31, 2025. Should Council approve this option, it is recommended to extend the current agreement for a sixteen (16) month period (until February 28, 2027) to allow time for a review of the pilot. The current agreement would also be revised to include a clause reflecting the City staffing for visitor hours.

The Society has offered to contribute \$4,000 for 2026 to support the costs of providing visitor hours.

Cost: one-time cost of \$27,000 (2026 wage rates)

Option 3 – No City Support for Visitor Hours for London Farmhouse

This option is not recommended as the Farmhouse is a valuable part of the visitor experience at London Farm. Additionally, closing the Farmhouse would hamper the Society's ability to bring in revenue from the gift shop, limiting their capacity to deliver activities and programs.

Options 1 and 2 are in keeping with the operation of other similar City facilities such as the Richmond Nature Park and Richmond Museum, where City staff maintain visitor hours and Society staff and volunteers deliver programs. Additionally, providing City staff at the London Farmhouse is anticipated to offer the following benefits:

- City staff go through the standard training in areas such as first aid, site security, and customer service thereby ensuring a safe, high-quality, consistent visitor experience across the Steveston Heritage Sites;
- Additional City presence at the site would allow a better understanding of Society programming and operations to ensure proper support is in place; and
- The Society can direct their resources towards continuing to offer the programs and services described above, as well as expanding their public programming to include new events.

Parking at London Farm

As expressed by the Society representatives in their delegation to Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services Committee on September 17, 2025, parking at London Farm is a challenge. London Farm is located along Dyke Road with approximately 30-35 parking spaces for visitors to both London Farm or the Dyke Trail available along the roadway and in the parking lot off Dyke Road. Public parking is not allowed inside the London Farm site to maintain public safety and protect the heritage structures and displays. For larger events, the Society organizes a shuttle to and from the site to another parking location such as Homma Elementary School field.

This section of Dyke Road is planned to be raised as part of a future dyke project, which is currently undergoing additional public engagement. Changes to parking for London Farm will be considered as part of this project with the goal to maintain or increase parking as is feasible within the constraints of the location.

Next Steps

Should Council approve the recommended option the current operating agreement with the Society will be amended to reflect the City's staffing of the visitor hours and extended for a period of sixteen (16) months. This will allow time for both organizations to get clarity on responsibilities as well as the ideal number of visitor hours and related costs.

Should Council approve the recommended option, a review of visitor hours and site operations will take place during 2026. The results of this review along with recommendations will be shared in a future report to Council.

Designs for the raising of Dyke Road which include recommendations on improvements to parking for London Farm visitors, will be brought to Council for consideration at a future date.

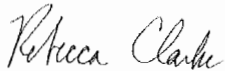
Financial Impact

The cost to support a one-year pilot of visitor hours at London Farmhouse is \$27,000. This can be accommodated by reallocating previously approved project funding.

Conclusion

On September 17, 2025, the London Heritage Farm Society delegated to the Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services Committee to speak about their current operations. The Society has expressed that they are no longer able to maintain visitor hours for the Farmhouse at London Farm and have requested the City take on this responsibility. It is recommended that Council approve the proposed pilot to provide City staff to maintain visitor hours at the London Farmhouse for 2026.

Opportunities to improve parking for London Farm visitors are being explored as part of the future dyke raising project along Dyke Road.



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