




COMMUNICATION UPDATE

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| TO: | Mayor and Members of Council |
| DATE: | January 9, 2026 |
| SUBJECT: | Poet In Place Pilot Program Update |
| WARD(S) AFFECTED: | City Wide |
| SUBMITTED BY: | Lisa Abbott Director, Tourism and Culture Division Planning and Economic Development Department |
| SIGNATURE: |  |

The purpose of this Communication Update is to provide Council with an update on the Poet in Place program. Planned as a two-year pilot for 2024-2025, the current term of the Poet in Place concluded in December 2025.

Background

In September 2022 Council directed Tourism and Culture staff to develop and present a framework to the General Issues Committee for the implementation of a Poet Laureate Program and Youth Poet Laureate Program.

In May 2023, the program framework was presented to Council, funded from the Cultural Strategic Initiatives capital project. The pilot was designed based on feedback from the community through a consultation process. The goals of the program were to complement work already being done as part of placemaking, to enhance public space, to elevate the art of poetry and spoken word and to increase access to the art of creative writing for residents.

An open call for applicants was issued and a local artist was chosen by a citizen jury for a two-year term.

Outcomes

In addition to the value of poetry and the literary arts from an artistic perspective, there are direct economic benefits stemming from Hamilton's long history of having an established literary community. Book publishing in Canada is a \$1.4 billion industry with Ontario Creates reporting that \$980 million came from Ontario in 2025. Hamilton has 12 independent bookstores and 2

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OUR Mission: To provide high quality cost conscious public services that contribute to a healthy, safe and prosperous community, in a sustainable manner.

OUR Culture: Collective Ownership, Steadfast Integrity, Courageous Change, Sensational Service, Engaged Empowered Employees.

publishing houses. Wolsak & Wynn has operated for almost 45 years on James Street North originally established by two Hamilton poets, Heather Cadsby and Marja Jacobs. Attawandaron is a small publisher with a focus on works of local interest such as “Buchanan of Auchmar” and “Hamilton: Weird and Wonderful”, both written by Hamiltonian Bill King.

Lishai Peel was named as the City of Hamilton’s inaugural Poet in Place serving a two-year term from 2024-2025. Some of the highlights from this period include:

- Performed original works and emceed the HPL’s Hamilton Reads “Evening for Book Lovers” launch events in 2024 and 2025.
- Wrote an original poem “Bones” inspired by Hamilton’s waterfront which is on display at Pier 8 on a billboard and the Discovery Centre. To enhance the experience, a recording of Lishai performing the poem is available on the City’s website.
- Wrote an original poem “Claim Me” inspired by James St N which is displayed on banners at the corner of James St N and Wilson St in downtown Hamilton. A little poetry library has also been installed for community use.
- Performed original work, including new poem “Go on and dance”, and led workshops at various public events.
- Facilitated workshops with the Hamilton Public Library (HPL) in April 2025 during National Poetry Month. Registration for both workshops were at capacity.

Lishai was a champion for poetry and spoken word art forms partnering with the Hamilton Public Library, Hamilton Arts Council, Hamilton Literary Awards, gritLIT Readers and Writers Festival and Monday Press in addition to performing her works at festivals and events across the city.

Next Steps

Staff has documented lessons learned from the pilot and are working with the Hamilton Public Library to transition the program to that organization to launch some time in the future. Unless further directed by Council, there are no plans to continue the program in 2026 due to staffing and budget constraints.

For more information about the Poet in Place pilot program, please visit www.hamilton.ca/PoetinPlace or contact Sarah Ehmke, Senior Project Manager – Placemaking and Animation by email at Sarah.Ehmke@hamilton.ca or by phone at (905) 546-2424 Ext. 7505.

APPENDICES AND SCHEDULES ATTACHED

Appendix “A” – Poet in Place 2024-2025 Final Report