



**STAFF REPORT
ACTION REQUIRED
Confidential Attachment**

Appointment of the Third City of Toronto Poet Laureate

| | |
|---|---|
| Date: | September 3, 2009 |
| To: | Economic Development Committee |
| From: | General Manager, Economic Development, Culture and Tourism |
| Wards: | All |
| Reason for Confidential Information: | This report deals with personal matters about an identifiable person. |
| Reference Number: | P:/2009/Cluster A/EDCT/ECON DEV/September/ed0909-030 |

SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to appoint the third City of Toronto Poet Laureate. This report recommends that Council approve the candidate identified in Confidential Attachment No. 1 for a three-year term under the terms outlined in this report.

The position of The City of Toronto Poet Laureate honours a poet who writes excellent poetry and has written on themes that are relevant to the people who live here. Toronto's Poet Laureate advocates for poetry and the arts, attracts people to the literary world, and uses his or her unique perspective to create a dialogue on contemporary issues.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The General Manager of Economic Development, Culture and Tourism recommends that:

1. Council appoint the selected individual listed in Attachment 1 to the position of third Poet Laureate for the City of Toronto for a three-year term; and

2. Council authorize the public release of the confidential information in Attachment 1, upon adoption of this report.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

Funding for the Poet Laureate honorarium of \$10,000 per annum is included in the approved 2009 Cultural Services operating budget.

The Deputy City Manager and Chief Financial Officer has reviewed this report and agrees with the financial impact information.

DECISION HISTORY

At its meeting, held on July 4, 5 and 6, 2000, Council directed the Commissioner of Economic Development Culture and Tourism to develop a plan, in partnership with the League of Canadian Poets and other community stakeholders, for the selection and appointment of a Poet Laureate for the City of Toronto in 2001.

The City of Toronto Poet Laureate was initiated with Dennis Lee serving as Canada's first municipal Poet Laureate. Since then several Canadian cities have embraced the idea including Montreal, Vancouver, Edmonton and Winnipeg. Dennis Lee assumed the position and embarked on an ambitious program that saw the 2008 unveiling of a monument to contemporary poet Al Purdy. Pier Giorgio di Cicco became the second City of Toronto Poet Laureate assuming his position in October, 2004. As Poet Laureate, he has used the role to influence municipal policy in issues that address the urban aesthetic and its relationship to liveable and sustainable cities.

ISSUE BACKGROUND

The Poet Laureate must be a Toronto-based poet who has produced a body of published work that displays literary excellence, includes poems about Toronto subjects and has influence on other writers. The Poet Laureate must be willing to serve and have the ability to be an ambassador for writers and the literary arts. All writing, notes and original materials produced during the tenure of the Poet Laureate remain the property of the individual, who shall retain all right thereto. The City of Toronto undertakes to use its communication resources to promote the post of Poet Laureate. The City makes extensive use of its web page and will maintain a link within the Cultural Services existing site.

The Poet Laureate must be given the opportunity to write. In exchange for the honorarium, the Poet Laureate will commit approximately 15 percent of his/her working time to duties as the Poet Laureate. The time is to be devoted to serving as Toronto's literary ambassador at events that promote the literary arts and to creating a legacy project for the people of Toronto. The duties of the Poet Laureate do not include reading manuscripts or writing poems at civic occasions.

COMMENTS

In keeping with the notion that the position of the Poet Laureate is an honour bestowed rather than a position of employment, poets are not invited to apply for the position. As such, in June 2009, an expert selection committee was assembled from the local literary community to nominate a candidate. Members of the selection committee included Susan Feldman (Executive Producer, Literary Programs at CBC); James Polk (publishing consultant and former editor-in-chief, Anansi Press); Desi di Nardo, (Toronto poet and League of Canadian Poets board member); Joanne Saul (owner of Type bookstores); Martha Baillie (bilingual author and writer-in-residence at the Toronto Public Library); and Jemeni Gairy (broadcaster and hip-hop artist). The selection committee relied on its expertise and consultation with the community to select a candidate. Its recommendation was unanimous with full agreement by staff in Cultural Services.

Toronto has a strong and thriving literary tradition. By continuing the honorary position of City of Toronto Poet Laureate, Council reinforces support for this tradition and the city's literary community as a whole. It is the intention that through this confirmation, the Poet Laureate will bring outstanding poetry to a wider public, and that the City of Toronto can look forward to dynamic legacy project for the city.

CONTACT

Rita Davies, Executive Director, Cultural Services
Phone: 416-397-5323; Fax: 416-392-5600; E-mail: rdavies@toronto.ca

SIGNATURE

Michael H. Williams, General Manager
Economic Development, Culture and Tourism

ATTACHMENT 1

Appointment of the Third City of Toronto Poet Laureate