



**STAFF REPORT
ACTION REQUIRED
with Confidential Attachment**

Appointment of Fifth City of Toronto Poet Laureate

Date:	September 22, 2015
To:	Economic Development Committee
From:	General Manager, Economic Development and Culture
Wards:	All
Reason for Confidential Information:	This report deals with personal matters about an identifiable person.
Reference Number:	AFS -21075

SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to recommend the appointment of the fifth City of Toronto Poet Laureate. It recommends that City 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 focuses on themes that are relevant to the people who live in the city. Toronto's Poet Laureate advocates for poetry and the arts-particularly literary 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 and Culture recommends that:

1. City Council appoint the selected individual named in Attachment 1 to the position of Poet Laureate for the City of Toronto for a three-year term; and
2. City 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 Economic Development and Culture base 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.

<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/2000/agendas/council/cc/cc000704/edp7rpt/cl016.pdf>

In May of 2001 the City of Toronto Poet Laureate program was initiated with Dennis Lee serving as Toronto's first Poet Laureate. Pier Giorgio Di Cicco became the second Poet Laureate in 2004. Dionne Brand was the third City of Toronto Poet Laureate assuming the position in September of 2009.

Toronto's fourth Poet Laureate, George Elliott Clarke, was appointed on November 2012 and his term expires this year.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2012.ED18.9>

ISSUE BACKGROUND

The following duties and terms of the Poet Laureate were approved by Council at its meeting held on March 12, 2001.

Duties:

The Poet Laureate must be given the opportunity to write. The Poet Laureate will commit approximately 15 percent of his 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 for civic occasions. It is the wish of Council that the Poet Laureate develop a legacy project for the City. The project must be designed in co-operation with City staff and will be unique to the individual.

Term:

The term of the Poet Laureate is three years.

Selection Criteria:

The Poet Laureate must be a Toronto poet who has produced a body of published work that:

- (1) displays literary excellence;
- (2) includes poems about Toronto subjects; and
- (3) has influenced other writers.

The Poet Laureate must be willing to serve and have the ability to be an ambassador for writers and the literary arts.

Remuneration:

The Poet Laureate will receive an honorarium of \$10,000 per annum. Travel and incidental expenses associated with performing the Poet Laureate's duties shall come from that sum and will not be reimbursed. The City of Toronto gives the money to the Poet Laureate outright and will not audit these expenses.

Administrative Support:

Administrative support includes a mailing address and support for routine office tasks and correspondence. It does not include secretarial assistance for preparing drafts or manuscripts for publication.

Intellectual Property:

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.

Publicity and Promotion:

The City of Toronto undertakes to use its communication resources to promote the post of the Poet Laureate. The City makes extensive use of its web page and will maintain a link within the existing Arts & Culture Services site.

COMMENTS

Since the appointment of Dennis Lee, Toronto's first Poet Laureate and Canada's first municipal poet laureate, several other Canadian cities have followed Toronto's example. These cities include Victoria, Vancouver, Edmonton, Calgary, Winnipeg, Montreal, Halifax and St. John's. Short biographies of all of the City of Toronto's Poets Laureate may be found here:

<http://www1.toronto.ca/wps/portal/contentonly?vgnextoid=52a7b82e5c1ff310VgnVCM10000071d60f89RCRD>

The position of the Poet Laureate is an honour bestowed and not a position of employment. As such, candidates are not invited to apply for the position. In July 2015, an expert selection committee was assembled from the local literary community to nominate a candidate. Members of the selection committee included Joanna Poblocka (Executive Director, League of Canadian Poets), Lillian Necakov-Avalos (Branch Head, Toronto Public Library), Alana Wilcox (Editorial Director, Coach House Books), David Silverberg (Founder/Artistic Director, Toronto Poetry Slam), and Toronto's current Poet Laureate, George Elliott Clarke. The selection committee relied on its expertise and consultation with the community to select a candidate; its recommendation is made with full agreement by staff in Arts & Culture Services.

As an honorary position, the duties and activities of the Poet Laureate are defined, in part, by the individual assuming the role. Each Poet has been invited to consider undertaking a legacy project while in office. As Poet Laureate, Dennis Lee embarked on an ambitious program that saw the 2008 unveiling of a monument to contemporary poet Al Purdy. Pier Giorgio Di Cicco used the role to influence municipal policy in issues that address the urban aesthetic and its relationship to liveable and sustainable cities. Dionne Brand saw the opportunity to raise the profile of poetry in the public realm through her legacy project, Poetry is Public is Poetry. A website was developed along with three projects that placed permanent physical representations of poetry in branches of the Toronto Public Library. During her term Ms. Brand was honoured with the 2011 Griffin Poetry Prize for her novel-length narrative poem, *Ossuaries*.

As Toronto's Fourth Poet Laureate, George Elliot Clarke has been a very active public figure. He quickly established the Poet Laureate's wall outside the City Hall branch of the Toronto Public Library, had a Poet Laureate medal struck and kicked off National Poetry Month each year of his term with a recitation of an original poem in the Council chamber. He participated in Remembrance Day ceremonies, the Torch Relay for the Pan Am Games, and numerous City-related events. Dr. Clarke worked tirelessly partnering with a variety of institutions including the Art Gallery of Ontario, the Toronto Public Library, the League of Canadian Poets, Gilda's Club, Luminato, Heritage Toronto, Children's Peace Theatre, East End Arts, Canada Blooms, and many more. Dr. Clarke's legacy includes the establishment of the East End Poetry Festival, two poetry-related heritage plaques, and an original poem to be inscribed in stone in a refurbished Ramsden Park to be completed in 2016.

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

CONTACT

Terry Nicholson
Director, Arts & Culture Services
Tel: 416-392-4166
Fax: 416-392-5600
tnichols@toronto.ca

SIGNATURE

Michael H. Williams
Economic Development and Culture

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 – Confidential Information