

Donation of Park to Commemorate the Victims of the Irish Famine (Downtown)

(City Council on July 4, 5 and 6, 2000, adopted this Clause, without amendment.)

The Toronto Community Council recommends the adoption of the following report (June 15, 2000) from the Commissioner of Economic Development, Culture and Tourism:

Purpose:

This report is to outline the details of the Toronto Irish Community's donation and dedication of a waterfront park area to commemorate the victims of the Irish Famine.

Financial Implications and Impact Statement:

The provisions of the donation include sufficient funds to develop the park area, and to provide an ongoing legacy for its maintenance.

There are no financial implications resulting from the adoption of this report.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that:

- (1) approval be given to accept the official gift of commemorative sculptures, the final location of the waterfront park area, the proposed name of the park area and the detailed design and implementation schedule, including the results of the historical and heritage significance of the Irish Famine Victims who relocated to Toronto.
- (2) authority be given to negotiate a suitable operating agreement with the Committee for Ireland Park in a form acceptable to the Commissioner of Economic Development, Culture and Tourism and the City Solicitor.

Background:

The Irish Community in Canada has been working to identify a suitable way to commemorate the suffering of their relatives during the Irish Famine and has approached the Parks and Recreation Division with an innovative and appropriate proposal. The background proposal was attached to the initial staff report submitted on January 31, 2000 and titled "Parks Improvements – Donation to Commemorate the Victims of the Irish Famine (Downtown)". City Council adopted this report without amendment.

Comments:

The location of the waterfront park area, in the downtown core of Toronto, is in the southeast corner of Bathurst Street and Queens Quay West. Silos border the park to the north; a concrete sea wall along the Western Channel borders the park to the south; a concrete sea wall along the Portland Street Slip borders the park to the east; and a stone wall borders the park to the west. (Attachment No. 1)

The original park request was for an area approximately 90 metres wide by 30 metres long. However, after a meeting with representatives from Economic Development, Culture and Tourism and Corporate Services, Facilities and Real Estate Division, the park size has been reduced by approximately fifty percent. The actual size of the park, trapezoidal in shape, measures approximately 45 metres wide and the length narrows from 25 metres to 21 metres heading from west to east. The design details are in Attachment No. 2 and Attachment No. 3.

Representatives from Economic Development, Culture and Tourism's Parks and Recreation Division and Policy and Development Division have met with representatives from The Committee for Ireland Park with regards to the location, size, and design of the waterfront park area to ensure that all appropriate parks' standards are applied.

The proposed name of the waterfront park area is Ireland Park. Named by the proponents, The Committee for Ireland Park.

Construction and landscaping of Ireland Park would commence early in July 2000 and would be completed early in September 2000, depending on the schedules of the various contractors involved. A planned official opening and park dedication is scheduled for October 1, 2000 with political delegations from Ireland and Canada in attendance. This will coincide with the Millennium Voyage of the vessel "Jeanie Johnston", sailing from Ireland to Toronto, and visiting Washington, Philadelphia, New York, Boston, St. John, New Brunswick, Grosse Ile, Quebec City and Montreal along the way.

The following text from a communicative plaque, unveiled by Heritage Toronto on King Street at Metro Hall in October of 1997, best provides the historical and heritage significance of the Irish Famine Victims who relocated to Toronto:

"Irish Immigration And The Fever Sheds 1847

Fleeing disease, poverty, the failure of the potato crop and government indifference, over 100,000 Irish immigrants arrived in Canada in 1847. Of these, nearly 40,000 passed through Toronto, a city of some 20,000. Many thousands died on the "Coffin" ships on the journey from Ireland to Canada. Many more died at the quarantine station at Grosse Ile, a small island northeast of Quebec City. From Grosse Ile and Quebec City, immigrants came by steamship to ports along the St. Lawrence and Lake Ontario.

In the summer of 1847, 863 Irish immigrants died of Typhus in the fever sheds erected by the Toronto Board of Health at the northwest corner of King and John Sts. There were at least 12 sheds, 72 feet long by 25 feet wide.

Immigrants landed at the foot of Simcoe Street. The healthy were assisted out of the city as soon as possible; the sick were treated in hospital or at the Fever Sheds. They were allowed to stay a maximum of six days, receiving a daily ration of three-quarters of a pound of bread and meat. Survivors were sent to the Convalescent Home at the corner of Bathurst and Front Sts. Most of the dead were buried beside St. Paul's Roman Catholic Church at Queen and Power Sts.

Among those who died ministering to the sick was Toronto's first Roman Catholic Bishop, the Right Reverend Michael Power, D.D. He contracted typhus and died on October 1st, 1847 and is buried in St. Michael's Cathedral.

Prayers said at the unveiling by M. Pearse Lacey D.D., Roman Catholic Bishop Emeritus of Toronto and Terence E. Finlay, Anglican Bishop of Toronto

Unveiled by the Ambassador of Ireland to Canada, His Excellency Paul D. Dempsey
October 1st, 1997

Heritage Toronto"

Conclusions:

The details of the proposal including location, name and design have been well thought out and are fully supported by staff. Ireland Park contributes to the Waterfront Vision by adding new parkland without financial implication to the City, serving as a significant tourist link between Ireland and Canada, and commemorating the events of the Irish Famine of 1847. The Metronome Canada facility will be consulted in the final development of the site plan.

Contact:

John A. Macintyre, Director
Parks and Recreation Division, Central Services and The Waterfront
Phone: 397-4451; Fax: 392-8565; E-mail: jmacint@city.toronto.on.ca

Map 1

Map 2

Map 3