



STAFF REPORT ACTION REQUIRED

Proposed Re-Naming of Union Station

Date:	June 17, 2014
To:	Executive Committee
From:	Phyllis Berck, Director, Toronto Office of Partnerships
Wards:	All
Reference Number:	

SUMMARY

Executive Committee requested, at its February 23, 2014 meeting, that staff consult with the general public and relevant stakeholders regarding the feasibility of renaming Union Station after Sir John A. Macdonald, one of the "Fathers of Confederation". The purpose of this report is to recommend that Union Station not be renamed in honour of Canada's first Prime Minister for the following reasons:

- The Station's name and edifice are iconic and both are considered to be core components of the City's history and heritage;
- The general public and key stakeholders do not support the idea;
- Changing the name would have substantive operational impacts;
- Such a renaming would not be in line with the City's Honourific and Street Naming Policy;

In lieu of Union Station, it is recommended that the City mark the bicentennial of our first Prime Minister's birth by formally naming, upon completion of the Union Station revitalization and other considerations, the new plaza being developed at the Station's entrance after Sir John A. Macdonald.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Toronto Office of Partnerships recommends that:

1. Union Station not be re-named to Sir John A. Macdonald Station;
2. Council authorize, upon completion of the Union Station revitalization, that the plaza that is being redeveloped in front of Union Station be formally named after Sir John A. Macdonald;
3. Council authorize, upon addressing outstanding operational issues, the installation of a plaque on Union Station's parapet wall to commemorate the naming of the new Sir John A. Macdonald Plaza; and
4. In accordance with the City's Honourific and Street Naming Policy, the purchase and installation of the Sir John A. Macdonald plaque be contingent upon securing the necessary funding from external parties.

Financial Impact

No financial impacts arise from this report. As per the City's Honourific and Street Naming Policy, the proposed naming is to be cost neutral to the City.

DECISION HISTORY

At its meeting on February 4, 2014, the Executive Committee:

1. Requested the City Manager to report on the renaming of Union Station to Sir John A. Macdonald Station on or before the July 2, 2014 meeting of the Executive Committee, at which time the public will have the opportunity to make deputations on this matter.
2. Requested the City Manager to consult with the committee known as Toronto Friends of Sir John A. Macdonald in the preparation of the report.
3. Directed the City Manager to seek public input from appropriate groups and individuals in the preparation of the report.

ISSUE BACKGROUND

Councillor Minnan-Wong proposed at the February 4, 2014, Executive Committee meeting that the City of Toronto consider renaming Union Station after Sir John A.

Macdonald. Later that month, Council requested staff to report back "on the feasibility of renaming a significant street in the City of Toronto as Sir John A. Macdonald Avenue".

By bestowing these honours, the City would both commemorate the significant achievements of Canada's first Prime Minister and promote the two-hundredth anniversary of his birth.

COMMENTS

Sir John A. Macdonald

Sir John Alexander Macdonald's contributions to our country cannot be understated. He was "the dominant creative mind which produced the British North America Act and the union of provinces which became Canada" (Canadian Encyclopedia). As one of the country's founding fathers and its first Prime Minister, Macdonald became a nation-builder who oversaw the expansion of the Dominion from sea to sea. His political career spanned almost half a century, including 19 years as Prime Minister (only William Lyon Mackenzie King served longer), during which he set the course for Canada's growth and development in a number of ways including:

- The introduction of the National Policy, a system which promoted tariffs to protect Canadian markets from foreign competition, thereby stimulating Canadian industry and creating jobs.
- Completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway, which was essential to unifying and growing the Dominion of Canada. The railway's completion in 1885 made possible the future settlement of the West and was instrumental in ensuring the sovereignty of Canada across the continent.
- Immigration policies that laid the groundwork for populating the West and securing the territory for Canada. Future political leaders continued Macdonald's plans of promoting emigration to Canada as a means of fostering the economy and bringing the country together.

Union Station

Union Station is the busiest, most important, multimodal, passenger transportation hub in Canada, serving a quarter-million people daily. In fact, more than half of all Canadian inter-city passengers travel by way of Union Station.

It was built by Canadian Pacific Railway and Grand Trunk Railway during the last great phase in railway station construction and at a time when a railway station was viewed as the gateway to a city. Construction began in 1914 and when officially opened in 1927, Union was the largest and most opulent station erected in Canada.

In 1975, Parks Canada designated Union Station a National Historic Site. The agency noted that "it was, and still is, the country's finest example of a classical beaux-arts-style railway station and the largest of the great urban train stations built during the early 20th century during an era of expanding national rail networks and vigorous urban growth." In addition, Union has been deemed a Heritage Railway Station since 1989.

For the past 85 years, Union Station has been one of the most significant hubs in Canada's transportation network. Furthermore, as noted on the City's website, "many events that have helped to shape the nation have taken place at Union Station. It was the scene of tearful goodbyes and joyful reunions during the Second World War and was also a gateway for many immigrants arriving in Canada. Today, the station is recognizable nation-wide."

Policy Implications of the Proposed Re-Naming

Council adopted the City of Toronto Honourific and Street Naming Policy in November 2011. A revised Policy was subsequently approved in December 2013.

The Policy outlines a number of criteria for considering the commemorative naming of City properties including:

- the re-naming of properties and streets will only be pursued in exceptional circumstances and be considered within the context of the historical and/or community significance of the existing name...(s.5.1.2)
- division staff shall only recommend names that...after consulting with the local community and councillor, are determined to have general public support (s.6.1.1)

Public & Stakeholder Consultations

As directed by the Executive Committee, staff undertook consultations with the general public as well as with specific internal and external stakeholder groups.

The public consultations were led by Heritage Toronto in the form of an online survey. The survey was publicized via the City's website as well as various social media networks including Facebook and Twitter. In addition, staff reached out to various groups including local and national associations as well as the Friends of Sir John A. Macdonald society to promote the survey and ensure a robust response. In all, a total of 2,145 individuals participated in the survey and the overwhelming majority of them (over 95%) voted against renaming Union Station after Macdonald. Moreover, when asked if our first Prime Minister should be honoured in some other way within the City, the results were decidedly mixed. Only 37% of respondents favoured another form of commemoration while the remainder were either against the idea (35%) or undecided (28%).

In addition to the general survey, staff sought direct input from over a dozen stakeholders including the local councillor, VIA Rail, GO/Metrolinx, the TTC, Parks Canada and Osmington Inc. (the head lessee of the retail spaces being developed as part of the Union Station Revitalization). All of those contacted were either against the proposed re-naming or had no position on the matter. None were expressly supportive of such a change.

Conclusion

In light of the following facts, it is recommended that the City not proceed with the proposal to re-name Union Station after Sir John A. Macdonald:

- While the name "Union Station" is not unique (there were two predecessor stations in Toronto called Union and there are a number of train stations across the continent which carry the name) both the name and structure are an integral part of the city's history, identity and legacy.
- There is very limited public support for the renaming. The results of the City survey mirror a number a media polls in which the vast majority of respondents were opposed to the idea. It is clear that, in the eyes of most residents, Union Station remains an iconic building with significant heritage value and that its name should not be altered unless necessary.
- The operational implications would be significant. Such a re-naming would necessitate the development of new marketing and signage (changing city maps and signs at VIA Rail, GO/Metrolinx and TTC stations as well as highway exits, etc.) and a promotional campaign to communicate the change and the rationale for it. Furthermore, the intrinsic value of the "Union Station" brand would be lost.
- As per the City's Policy, there is no compelling reason or exceptional circumstance that warrants re-naming the entire Station after our first Prime Minister.
- To honour our first Prime Minister, it is recommended that in lieu of Union Station, the new plaza that is being constructed as part of the Station's revitalization, be named for Sir John A. Macdonald. Given his connection to railways and his focus on bringing Canadians together, such a meeting place at the foot of Union Station, is a fitting property with which to pay tribute to one of our country's greatest leaders. In the course of our consultations, such a naming was actually recommended by various members of the public as well as by local organizations like the Toronto Railway Historical Association which stated:

A far more appropriate venue to honor Macdonald would be the new plaza in front of Union Station, a site that heretofore has not had a name. It is flanked

on the south by Union Station and on the north by the Royal York Hotel. The hotel was a popular meeting place for influential legislators including Macdonald and many other Fathers of Confederation. Macdonald lived at the hotel when he was in Toronto, and several important political meetings that would lead to Confederation were held in the former Queen's Hotel. It would be far more appropriate for people to enjoy this new Sir John A. Macdonald Plaza and contemplate the Toronto connection with Canada's first Prime Minister than it would be to rename a facility that only opened 36 years after his death...

- After consulting with City divisions, including Facilities, Real Estate and Engineering & Construction Services, as well as outside parties such as Parks Canada, it appears that such a naming, while contingent upon various operational considerations (signage reviews, external approvals, etc.) is feasible. In order not to interfere with the revitalization efforts that are currently underway, the unveiling would only occur once the Station's reconstruction is completed. The dedication of this exterior space, which at present is only informally referred to as the Front St. plaza, would take the form of a plaque on the Station's parapet wall. As per the City's Honourific and Street Naming Policy, the purchase and installation of the plaque would only proceed once sufficient external funds are secured via donations from interested parties.

Reference

The City of Toronto's Honourific and Street Naming Policy is available at <http://www1.toronto.ca/City%20of%20Toronto/Toronto%20Office%20of%20Partnerships/pdf/Honourific%20&%20Street%20Naming%20Policy%202013.pdf>

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