

City Council

Motion Without Notice

MM12.30	ACTION			Ward: 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25
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Redressing Google's Misleading Portrayal of Scarborough - by Councillor Michael Thompson, seconded by Mayor John Tory

** This Motion has been deemed urgent by the Chair.*

** This Motion is not subject to a vote to waive referral. This Motion has been added to the agenda and is before Council for debate.*

Recommendations

Councillor Michael Thompson, seconded by Mayor John Tory, recommends that:

1. City Council request the Mayor to write to senior executives of Google Canada to express Council's disappointment in their search engine's inappropriate depiction of Scarborough, request a public apology to the people of Scarborough for choosing a demeaning and misleading photo to represent their community, and request that Google post a photograph in its place that is in keeping with the images used for other municipalities.
2. City Council request the City Manager to engage the Photo Laureate of Toronto to develop a photographic project or contest in Scarborough that encourages the public to take, and submit their best photographs of Scarborough, its scenic places and its communities; to launch such a project in the Spring of 2020; and to display the final images at an exhibition at the Scarborough Civic Centre in the Fall of 2020.

Summary

In mid-November 2019, an online query referencing the word "Scarborough" entered in the Google search engine brought to the computer screen a map of Toronto's Scarborough community, accompanied by a signature image of a partially demolished house. Similar searches of other municipalities, even those battling urban decay and high levels of violent crime, brought up images of attractive modern buildings and skylines.

When Councillor Thompson and the Mayor raised the issue publicly, Google told the news media that the image was selected not by a person, but by an automated algorithm. They removed the photo from the signature image position, leaving only the map. They offered no apology for the slight.

The appearance of an image of urban blight to represent Scarborough is symptomatic of the kind of geographic bigotry that has plagued the community for decades. Scarborough is not now, nor has it ever been, a community of broken houses and desolate places. It is one of the

City's most dynamic and vibrant communities and one of the best places in Toronto to live.

No place in the City better represents Toronto's motto of "diversity is our strength" than Scarborough. It is our most successful arrival City for immigrants, not from just one country or region, but from around the world. People come here from far and wide to live together, work together, celebrate together and thrive together. Its communities of new Canadians and old Canadians volunteer together and engage together to serve their neighbourhoods and the City at large.

The association of a partially demolished building with Scarborough reinforces negative misperceptions of the community and damages local morale. It is essential for City Council to defend the dignity of Scarborough, and its other vibrant communities when they are unfairly depicted as places of decay.

Background Information (City Council)

Member Motion MM12.30