

City Council**Notice of Motion**

MM25.17	ACTION			Ward: 13
---------	--------	--	--	----------

Authorization to Release Section 37 funds to fund the Production and Installation of a Heritage Plaque to Commemorate the History of the Underground Railroad Restaurant on King Street East - by Councillor Kristyn Wong-Tam, seconded by Councillor Mike Layton

** Notice of this Motion has been given.*

** This Motion is subject to referral to the Executive Committee. A two-thirds vote is required to waive referral.*

Recommendations

Councillor Kristyn Wong-Tam, seconded by Councillor Mike Layton, recommends that:

1. City Council increase the Approved 2020 Operating Budget for Heritage Toronto on a one-time basis by \$7,500.00 gross, \$0 net, fully funded by Section 37 community benefits obtained from the development at 65-77 King Street East and 46 Colborne Street (Source Account: XR3026-3701019), for the production and installation of a heritage plaque at 225 King Street East (Cost Centre HG0001).

Summary

The Underground Railroad soul food restaurant opened at 406 Bloor Street East in 1969, and later moved to 225 King Street East in April 1973. It was one of the City's first major restaurants to serve southern comfort food and it became a hot spot for Toronto's increasingly visible Black culture and visiting dignitaries and celebrities.

The business was a joint venture between football players John Henry Jackson and Dave Mann (both American players for the Toronto Argonauts) and Torontonians Howard Matthews (whose wife was Broadway star and jazz and blues singer Salome Bey), and celebrated jazz drummer Archie Alleyne.

The menu was a mix of soul food and Cajun, Creole, and West Indian dishes, such as fish gumbo, cornbread, southern fried chicken, hushpuppies, candied yams, and collard greens. The Underground Railroad was a major success and was popular with Torontonians, tourists, and celebrities alike: Harry Belafonte, Dizzy Gillespie, Miles Davis, Mick Jagger, Bob Dylan, Isaac Hayes, B.B. King, Stevie Wonder, Robert Plant, Peter O'Toole, Lee Majors, O.J. Simpson, Magic Johnson, Sugar Ray Leonard, and Bishop Desmond Tutu all ate there, and many had their photos framed on the wall. At Christmas, the owners would serve turkey dinners to those who needed it and supported Black youth and Caribana during its early years.

The Underground Railroad was forced to close in August 1988 and briefly re-opened on Church Street before shutting down permanently in August 1990.

As Heritage Toronto is a directly funded City agency and not an "outside party", no undertaking is required to be signed by Heritage Toronto to govern the use of the funds and financial reporting. As the original location at 406 Bloor Street is in Councillor Layton's Ward, a similar Motion recognizing that location is included in a separate Motion on the agenda.

Background Information (City Council)

Member Motion MM25.17