



Member Motion

City Council

Notice of Motion

MM31.11	ACTION			Ward: All
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Preserving the Past, and Protecting the Future of Little Jamaica - by Councillor Josh Matlow, seconded by Councillor Michael Thompson

** Notice of this Motion has been given.*

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

Recommendations

Councillor Josh Matlow, seconded by Councillor Michael Thompson recommends that:

1. City Council direct the Chief Planner, Executive Director, City Planning to prioritize a survey of the cultural heritage resources of Little Jamaica in the 2021 and 2022 City Planning Study Work Program as a part of the Council-adopted Little Jamaica Cultural District initiative (MM24.36, September 30 2020) and report back to City Council on the outcome of a comprehensive heritage survey, including an examination of the character and appearance of the area, and any recommendations for an individual property, concentration of properties or property features for a heritage conservation district, or cultural heritage landscape, to be protected under the Ontario Heritage Act and/or other land use planning mechanisms.
2. City Council direct the Chief Planner, Executive Director, City Planning to consult with BlackUrbanismTO, Black Futures on Eglinton, and additional community partners on the process, outcome and recommendations of the comprehensive heritage survey before reporting back to Council.

Summary

The heart and soul of Eglinton Avenue West, which is colloquially known as "Little Jamaica" or "Eglinton", is home to the highest concentration of Black and Caribbean-owned and operated businesses in Toronto. From the barbershops and hair salons that act as community spaces to the various restaurants that remind many of home, Eglinton Avenue West is an important part of Toronto's Black history.

However, the community has been fighting a battle against the potential loss of the character, identity and roots of their neighbourhood for years. Due to rising rents, construction of the Province's Light Rail Transit project and now, the COVID-19 pandemic, a growing number of prominent and historic small businesses have been forced to shutter their doors. While these factors have certainly contributed to the challenges this community face, we must not discount the silent yet significant roles of gentrification, Black displacement, and cultural erasure.

City Council recently adopted a motion on supporting Black and Caribbean-owned and operated businesses and preserving the cultural heritage of Little Jamaica through a 17 recommendation sustainability plan. In this robust and holistic motion, Council directed the City's Little Jamaica inter-divisional team to develop a Cultural District Plan, which will be informed through the application of an anti-Black racism lens. This would foster opportunities for historic preservation, economic development, growth in tourism and highlight the vibrant African, Black and Caribbean arts and culture.

While efforts are underway to preserve the architectural and cultural heritage of Little Jamaica, community members and key stakeholders have underscored the urgent need to preserve and protect this neighbourhood through the form of a heritage conservation district and/or use of other new and existing mechanisms. Municipal planning policies have historically served to disenfranchise Black communities, and the application of an anti-Black racism lens will be needed to ensure all future engagement and consultations to explore a heritage conservation designation meaningfully addresses the needs of Black communities.

The City of Toronto must respond to this call, while acting as an ally to our city's African, Black and Caribbean communities. Through creating this space of learning, the findings gathered will be informed by lived experience and authentic conversation. This will further empower the City of Toronto to celebrate the identity, and showcase the resiliency of the African, Black and Caribbean communities and their contributions to our City.

Background Information (City Council)

Member Motion MM31.11