

**City Council****Notice of Motion**

MM38.2	ACTION			Ward: All
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**Authorization to Release Section 37 funds to Fund the Production and Installation of a Heritage Plaque to Recognize the Significance of the Andrew Mercer Reformatory - by Councillor Joe Cressy, seconded by Councillor Gord Perks**

*\* 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 Joe Cressy, seconded by Councillor Gord Perks, recommend that:

1. City Council increase the Approved 2021 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 165 and 171 East Liberty Street (Source Account: XR3026-3701057), for the production and installation of a heritage plaque to recognize the significance of the Andrew Mercer Reformatory for Women (Cost Centre: HG0001).

**Summary**

This Motion seeks authorization to release \$7,500 in Section 37 funds to Heritage Toronto for the creation and installation of a heritage plaque to recognize the significance of the Andrew Mercer Reformatory for Women.

Opened in 1880, the Andrew Mercer Reformatory for Women was the first reformatory and prison in Canada built exclusively for women. The province used \$90,000 from the estate of philanthropist Andrew Mercer to build the facility on King Street West, near Dufferin Street, where Allan Lamport Stadium now stands. Its original capacity was for 250 women, with a 50-person wing devoted to the imprisonment of girls under 14.

In addition to confining women, the Reformatory also aimed to teach women Victorian virtues such as domesticity, servility, and obedience. Incarcerated women performed household chores and were ostensibly taught cooking, baking, sewing, and knitting.

Within the first ten years of operation, the success of the reformatory was in question. Employees claimed there was little reforming of women and mostly forced labour, confinement, and abuse. Ontario's Female Refugees Act (1897-1964) was used to arrest and imprison girls and women if they were thought to be "incorrigible" or "unmanageable", found begging, drunk, or were suspected of leading an idle or dissolute life; vague terms that could be

applied to anything deemed immoral. Anyone could bring these charges forward. After 1913, a change was made to the Andrew Mercer Reformatory Act to allow indeterminate sentences.

Canadian legal scholar and historian, Constance Backhouse, has highlighted abuses inflicted on women in the institution, including Velma Demerson, who was one of the few people to receive compensation for her time at the Reformatory, and Muriel Walker. These women were subjected to several involuntary medical procedures by the reformatory doctor.

After years of allegations of abuse, a 1964 Grand Jury investigation publicly revealed what was happening at the Mercer Reformatory; medical care was inadequate, the gymnasium was unequipped and never used, the library had few books, spaces were inadequate and aging, and there were no real education classes. The Reformatory was finally closed and demolished in 1969 and inmates were moved to the Vanier Centre for Women in Brampton, Ontario. The former superintendent's house at 1177 King Street West is the only part of the Mercer Reformatory complex that remains. The majority of the former site is occupied by Lamport Stadium, which was built in 1974.

This Heritage Toronto plaque will provide public education about the Mercer Reformatory and the abuses suffered by women incarcerated there. Heritage Toronto will conduct additional research and consult with stakeholders during the creation of this plaque.

### **Background Information (City Council)**

Member Motion MM38.2