

***Expression of Condolence for
Sylvia Searles Elam by Toronto City Council***

Moved by: Mayor John Tory

Seconded by: Deputy Mayor Denzil Minnan-Wong

The Mayor and Members of Council are deeply saddened to learn of the passing of Sylvia Searles Elam on December 9, 2021.

Sylvia was a long standing public servant in Toronto and was the first Executive Director of the Mayor's Committee on Community and Race Relation for the former City of North York. The position was the first of its kind in Canada with a mandate to change the climate of race relations in the city and effect change in the civil service.

Sylvia forged relationships that would lead to systemic change in many community organizations and create programs for youth in vulnerable neighbourhoods. Sylvia used empathy, humour and her robust optimism to bring people together to diagnose problems and arrive at solutions.

In 1983 Sylvia moved on to a position in the Multicultural and Race Relations Division in the Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto and took on key roles dealing with policing and race relations issues.

Sylvia developed ways to bring about change for accessibility, equity targets and diverse representation. She developed an in house program for senior management that helped many understand systemic discrimination, human rights and the meaning of an equitable workforce. The program was recognized across the country and internationally.

Sylvia returned to the new City of Toronto in 2003 to work with former Mayor David Miller as his community liaison, a job she held until 2010. She led the development of Toronto's Community Safety and Priority Neighbourhood Strategies, helping to bring opportunity to thousands of deserving young people who faced barriers due to economic circumstances, race and newcomer status.

Sylvia left the City when she married Ken Elam and moved to the United States. Sylvia, the youngest of three daughters to Edsworth and Kathleen Searles, two respected leaders in the Toronto Black community, had some entrepreneurial endeavors after she left the public service but her time was mainly devoted to family life, something that was always important to her.

The City Clerk is asked to convey, on behalf of Members of Toronto City Council, our sincere sympathy to her husband Kenneth, sister Marjorie and her two nieces Trina and Davleen and the friends, and colleagues whose lives she touched. Sylvia will be missed.

December 15, 2021