

**From:** [Ronald Stagg](#)  
**To:** [Executive Committee](#)  
**Subject:** My comments for 2022.EX34.6 on July 12, 2022 Executive Committee  
**Date:** July 10, 2022 5:32:20 PM

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To the City Clerk:

Please add my comments to the agenda for the July 12, 2022 Executive Committee meeting on item 2022.EX34.6, A New Commemorative Framework for the City of Toronto's Public Spaces

I understand that my comments and the personal information in this email will form part of the public record and that my name will be listed as a correspondent on agendas and minutes of City Council or its committees. Also, I understand that agendas and minutes are posted online and my name may be indexed by search engines like Google.

Comments:

My comments are directed at the new commemorative guiding principles as outlined in the background for the discussion on July 12. While not discounting some of the principles, I wish to comment specifically on the criteria for choosing names. My concern was aroused by the process used to judge the name of Dundas Street, but extends well beyond that. It seems in the Dundas case that a quite small percentage of the total population of Toronto petitioned, claiming that Henry Dundas had impeded the abolition of slavery, and his name should therefore be removed from a street, a square, and other public areas in Toronto. When other citizens heard that Henry Dundas supported slavery, they joined the chorus demanding removal. The issue was dealt with by city staff, and a recommendation made to Council. This is the area of my greatest concern about the process. City staff have neither the time nor the expertise to research the background of historical issues. In this case, the staff leaned almost totally on information provided by the petitioners, information which represented a minority opinion concerning the activities of Henry Dundas regarding slavery. Most experts and evidence strongly contradicted the opinions of the minority. Council was therefore provided with only a small portion of the evidence. This was highlighted when Mississauga Council, provided with a balanced look at the evidence, chose not to change the name of Dundas Street. In the case of Dundas Street, the cost of changing city signs is only part of the cost. Small business owners along the route who use Dundas in their signage will also be faced with the consequences of an unnecessary change. Do they deserve to pay the financial consequences of a poorly researched decision?

The name of Ryerson Avenue has also been mentioned for a possible change, since Egerton Ryerson was responsible for residential schools, except he was not. The charge was propagated by the former Ryerson University, when it placed a plaque to that effect beside his statue in 2018, but a Ryerson Task Force concluded that he was not responsible, and was, in fact, a friend to Indigenous people. At the same time, the Task Force, which included no experts, and depended on submissions made to it, concluded, on the weakest of evidence, that Ryerson disrespected the very people with whom he was a friend and supporter, a conclusion which makes no sense, and suggested that Ryerson's name be taken off the university. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission also did not find Egerton Ryerson responsible for residential schools.

My point is not to debate the guilt or innocence of these two men, but rather to point out that Council needs to consider more than community input, which is susceptible to feelings of the moment, feelings which could change at any time, and to ensure that those beliefs are supported by the facts. This means that city staff should consult a variety of experts in the area of history related to the person, or other entity being considered for deletion, or addition. We do a disservice to our past and warp the present and the future of our city if we do not make the effort to base decisions on the full evidence available. While, in these two examples, the citizens demanding change are hoping to rid Toronto of names from its past that represent oppression of minorities, they are actually creating a myth, one based on a belief, not on fact. The question for us all is, do we want a city built on myth, or a city based on reality? Do we want to strip the city of its character in order to satisfy misinformed beliefs? To simply give in the uninformed opinion, or to consider only part of the evidence, does a disservice to the people of this great city, and to our heritage.

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