

July 8, 2022

RE: OBHS SUPPORT OF THE NEW COMMEMORATIVE FRAMEWORK FOR THE CITY OF TORONTO'S PUBLIC SPACES

July 12th, 2022 Executive Committee Meeting

Dear Mayor Tory & Executive Council,

The Ontario Black History Society has been observing with great interest, the process and progress of discussions surrounding the proposed renaming of Dundas Street. We have noted the conversations have been mixed as to the level of agreement as to how and whether this project should go forward and, of even greater concern, the spiralling costs associated with this project.

In spite of the debate of the potential involved costs, the core of Agenda Item EX34.6 is the development of the new commemorative framework that the OBHS is writing to express support for. The framework seeks to establish guidelines that aim to ensure increased representation of the diversity of Toronto in various forms of public commemoration and alters the traditional practice of recognizing individuals and events that lauded imperialism and colonization.

We support the implementation of the framework because of its wider implications and its relevance to our museum project. As many on this Council are probably aware, the OBHS is in the process of starting a fundraising campaign to create an African Canadian Museum and Cultural Space in the City of Toronto. We are working with the well-known consulting firm Lord Cultural Resources and continue to receive the support of Mayor Tory, with our thanks. Our goal is to locate a space that could be renovated or enlarged where we would be able to share the rich, dynamic history and stories of African Canadians, representative of the African diaspora, including those stolen and displaced as a result of the Transatlantic slave trade. These include Black people who were enslaved in Toronto and other places in Ontario and descendants of freedom seekers who travelled via the Underground Railroad under great hardships to settle in Ontario, including Toronto. The museum we seek to establish is intended to be a gathering in a space that will honour and celebrate their history regardless of where they originated from. This museum would also be an attraction to the many tourists who are beginning to resume visits to Toronto who, prior to the pandemic, often would drop into our offices in the Ontario Heritage Trust Building on Adelaide St. E. thinking we might have a museum there.

Our intention is to create a space that would be welcoming as well as educational to all. Such an endeavour would benefit many people and stakeholders. At the same time, this museum and cultural space would serve as a reminder that you cannot erase history and its ongoing impacts and will also reinforce the importance and benefits of recognizing Black history in a public space to elevate

awareness. The City will also benefit from the creation of jobs that will result from the construction and/or renovation of this museum as well as ongoing staffing when completed. In addition, the site will be advertised as a tourist attraction in Toronto which also adds to the City revenues.

The City's proposed commemorative framework and the OBHS's museum initiative both seek to address the issue of place-making and the importance of being intentional in creating spaces that are representative of groups that have been systematically marginalized or excluded, to foster a sense of belonging, and to contribute to public education to help to reduce discrimination and racism. This is one of the reasons the OBHS was established. The OBHS is an organization that was founded in 1978 by Dr. Daniel G. Hill, Donna Bender Hill, Wilson O. Brooks, Lorraine Hubbard, Joan Kazmarski, and others with a mandate to dedicate themselves to the study, preservation and promotion of Black history and heritage. Establishing a museum of African Canadian history and culture in the City of Toronto will be a tangible legacy that will continue to build on the foundation that they laid for future generations to follow.

Along with supporting the adoption of the framework, we want to ensure that Black people/stakeholders be part of the ongoing implementation dialogue to reflect the long history of Black people in Toronto. People of African descent have resided in Toronto since the 1790s and this framework helps to create a critical framework to understand the necessity to acknowledge that long presence and to take concrete action to address the legacies of anti-Blackness stemming from the Transatlantic slave trade.

Respectfully submitted,

Ontario Black History Society,

Board of Directors and Museum Committee