

July 11, 2022

Jennifer L. Dundas
Chairperson
Henry Dundas Committee of Ontario

Mayor John Tory, Councillors, and Staff
Toronto City Council
Toronto, Ontario

Your Worship, Councillors, and Staff,

The Henry Dundas Committee of Ontario hereby asks that you suspend the plan to re-name Dundas Street in light of information we have gathered over the last several months. There are compelling reasons to conclude that the decision to rename the street should be made according to a new “Commemorative Framework for the City of Toronto's Public Spaces,” and not the ad-hoc approach employed by Staff.

After examining thousands of pages of documents obtained through Freedom of Information requests and other sources, the Henry Dundas Committee of Ontario has uncovered evidence that Toronto Staff and City Council received misleading information before the vote to rename Dundas Street. We have summarized our findings in the enclosed report: *“Was Toronto Misled? Misinformation and false accusations behind the decision to rename Dundas Street.”*¹

Foremost among our discoveries is the degree to which the published work of a Scottish historian provided Staff and Council with an incorrect appraisal of Henry Dundas and his impact on the abolition of the slave trade. Staff relied heavily on the work of Dr. Stephen Mullen, a research associate at the University of Glasgow. His research paper, however, has now been exposed in a journal of the University of Edinburgh Press as substantially incorrect in important respects. An eminent scholar of Scottish history has called the integrity of Dr. Mullen’s research into question, saying: “historians have the right to interpret facts differently but not to knowingly misrepresent them.”

FOI documents show that senior Staff consulted with Dr. Mullen extensively, and arranged a meeting with him two days before his presentation to the Executive Committee in July of 2021. His influence on the re-naming review appears to have been overriding and foundational. His now-discredited research affected the decision-making process to such an extent that the process must be seen as materially impaired.

We also discovered evidence showing that the company that Staff hired to provide advice on public consultations was under-qualified and understaffed. She appears to have been overly-committed to a recommendation to rename Dundas Street. Other evidence shows that Staff substantially understated the probable costs of renaming Dundas Street. Using projections based on a US model for a similar street renaming project, we estimate that the Staff report excluded as much as \$20 million of foreseeable costs.

¹(Updated with minor changes to version dated May 11, 2022, distributed earlier to interested parties.)

In addition, we discovered the existence of a private survey of Dundas Street residents and businesses. It shows that 81% of decided residents and business owners opposed the name change. Staff had a mandate to consult with the businesses and residents on Dundas Street, but failed to capture the degree to which they would be affected, and why so many of them oppose the name change. Many of the 60 businesses with ‘Dundas’ in their business name stand to face tens of thousands of dollars in direct costs, and it is not apparent how many have the financial capacity to sustain such expenditures.

Taken as a whole, the evidence shows that the process that led to the staff recommendation to rename Dundas Street was incomplete and flawed by inaccurate information.

On this basis, the Henry Dundas Committee of Ontario calls on you to suspend the plan to rename Dundas Street, and send the matter back to the City Manager with a mandate to do the following:

1. Commission a balanced and fair assessment of historical evidence by an eminent historian with demonstrated expertise in British and Canadian political history;
2. Provide Council with an accurate and complete assessment of the total costs to taxpayers, individuals and businesses, in Toronto and Ontario, with a recommendation on the degree to which the City would subsidize the private costs of businesses and residents;
3. After the historical facts are settled, and *total* costs fairly assessed, conduct meaningful public consultations with the citizens of Toronto.

Council may wish to consider using the new commemorative framework for the proposal to rename Dundas Street. If so, we would ask that the framework be amended to guard against reliance on incorrect appraisals of history, and to require that decision-makers be informed, in advance, about the real costs associated with proposals to rename streets.

Yours truly,

Jennifer L. Dundas, BAA SF LLB
Chairperson
Henry Dundas Committee of Ontario
<https://hdcommittee.medium.com>

Encl.

(Report also available online at: <https://acrobat.adobe.com/link/track?uri=urn:aaid:scds:US:1b1df122-5352-3dbf-b9bf-02fc7005f3dc>)