

## City Council

### Notice of Motion

MM43.17	ACTION			Ward: 11
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#### **Authorization to Release Section 37 funds to fund the Production and Installation of a Heritage Plaque to Recognize Dr. Anderson Abbott - by Councillor Mike Layton 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 Mike Layton seconded by Councillor Gord Perks, recommends that:

1. City Council increase the 2022 Approved 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 297 College Street, secured for streetscape improvements (Source Account: XR3026-3700586), for the production and installation of a heritage plaque to recognize Dr. Anderson Abbott (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 Dr. Anderson Abbott.

Anderson Ruffin Abbott (1837–1913) was the first Canadian-born Black doctor. He was also an educator, journalist, hospital administrator, coroner and poet.

Born in Toronto, Abbott was the son of free Black property owners Wilson Ruffin and Ellen Abbott, who left Alabama after their store was ransacked in 1834. In Toronto, Wilson began to acquire land and buildings, and by 1871 he owned 48 properties and became active in politics.

Anderson Abbott studied at University College in Toronto in 1858 and 1859 and apprenticed under Dr. Alexander Augusta, the first Black person licensed to practice medicine in Canada. Abbott attended the School of Medicine in Toronto and received his medical license in 1862.

In 1863, Dr. Anderson Abbott attempted to enlist as a surgeon in the Union army in the American Civil War. At first rejected, he reapplied to be a medical cadet in an all-Black regiment and was accepted.

Between 1863 and 1865, he served in Washington, DC. He received numerous commendations for his service and became popular in Washington society. He and Dr. Augusta were two of eight Black physicians to serve in the Union army during the American Civil War.

The pair were close friends from their time together in Toronto and they caused a stir when they attended a public event together at the White House in February 1864.

At the time, Black people were an extremely rare — and still controversial — sight in the White House. The pair were briefly introduced to President Abraham Lincoln and First Lady Mary Todd Lincoln and attended a small reception. Dr. Abbott would later recall feeling that they couldn't have “created more surprise if we had been dropped down upon [the guests] through the skylight.”

Following the end of the Civil War in 1865, Abbott left the military and returned to Canada where he was admitted to the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario in 1869. He married Mary Ann Casey in 1871, the daughter of a successful Black barber.

They moved to Chatham, where he was appointed Kent County Coroner in 1874, the first Black person to hold that position. As president of the Wilberforce Educational Institute from 1873 to 1880, he fought against racially segregated schools in Canada.

Dr. Abbott was a contributor to various journals and in 1878 he was made president of the Chatham Literary and Debating Society and the Chatham Medical Society.

In 1894, he returned to the US, where he became Surgeon-in-Chief at Provident Hospital in Chicago, Illinois, which had been established in 1892 as the first Black-owned hospital in the country and a training school for Black nurses.

He returned to Toronto, where he resumed private practice and increasingly dedicated himself to writing editorials and articles for newspapers and magazines. His subjects included Black history, the Civil War, Darwinism, biology, poetry and medicine.

Anderson Abbott died in 1913, having broken barriers in the medical field and advocated for racial equality in education. He was an active community leader and prominent member of Toronto's and Ontario's Black community. His achievements are all the more impressive considering they happened in a time when opportunities for social, political and economic advancement were denied to many Black Canadians. He is buried in the Toronto Necropolis.

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

Member Motion MM43.17