

## **Naming of a Public Lane East of St Paul Street, Extending southerly of North Star Way**

**Date:** October 16, 2023

**To:** Toronto and East York Community Council

**From:** Director, Engineering Support Services, Engineering and Construction Services  
General Manager, Economic Development & Culture

**Wards:** Ward 13 - Toronto Centre

### **SUMMARY**

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This report recommends that the name "Henry Box Brown Lane" be approved to identify an existing public lane located east of St Paul Street, extending southerly of North Star Way.

This naming proposal complies with the City of Toronto Street Naming Policy which can be found at <https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2022/ex/bgrd/backgroundfile-228155.pdf>

This naming proposal is in alignment with the objectives of the [Guiding Principles](#) for Commemoration in the Public Realm.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

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Engineering & Construction Services and Economic Development & Culture recommend that Toronto and East York Community Council:

1. Approve the name "Henry Box Brown Lane" for an existing public lane located east of St Paul Street, extending southerly of North Star Way.

### **FINANCIAL IMPACT**

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The cost to install street name signage is approximately \$500 and is included within the Transportation Services Division's Operating Budget.

### **DECISION HISTORY**

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This is the first time that this issue is before Community Council.

## COMMENTS

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An application was submitted on January 27, 2023 from a resident requesting to name the existing public lane located east of St Paul Street, extending southerly of North Star Way, as “Henry Box Brown Lane” nodding Henry Box Brown, a notable figure that is connected with the Underground Railroad movement that lived and was buried in Toronto.

The following background and rationale provided by the applicant:

### “Henry Box Brown”

*“Mr. Brown is a notable figure that is connected with the Underground Railroad movement. He lived and is buried in Toronto. Most importantly, the rowhouse in which he lived on Bright Street still stands. Commemorating Henry ‘Box’ Brown will preserve and add to the knowledge base of Black History in Toronto. Following the sale and relocation of his spouse and three children to another plantation, Brown began to devise a plan of escape to Pennsylvania, U.S.A. After procuring a carpenter to build a box he enlisted the help of James C.A. Smith, a friend, and shopkeeper Samuel A. Smith to help (both Smiths were unrelated). On the morning of March 23, 1849, Brown stepped into a wooden box approximately three feet long, two feet wide, and two feet, eight inches deep. The only essentials he took for his trip was a fan, some water and a few biscuits. After the box was secured, the 200-pound human cargo began its hazardous journey to Philadelphia. He arrived some 27 hours later at the office of the Philadelphia Anti-Slavery Society. From the day he stepped onto free soil Brown became somewhat of a celebrity and his heroic feat gained him the by name of Henry ‘Box’ Brown. Once a free man, Brown made it his mission to inform people about the evils of slave life. This was made possible through the publication of his autobiography and speaking engagements. Following the passage of the federal Fugitive Slave Act in 1850, requiring that slaves be returned to their owners, Brown sailed for England. During 25 years abroad he married, had a family and earned his living as a lecturer and entertainer. In 1875 the Brown Family emigrated to the United States and within six years are known to have been residing in Ontario. While in Canada, Henry Brown earned his income as a magician and hypnotist; sometimes enlisting the help of his daughter and spouse during performances. In 1887 “The Brown Family” were part of a benefit concert at St. Lawrence Hall, around the time they were residing on Bright Street in Corktown Toronto.”*

The named party passed away on June 15, 1897.

The applicant was unable to secure consent of the named party's representative, however, Section 3.12; 3.12.1 of the Street Naming Policy allows for the approval of a name without consent, provided reasonable efforts were made to obtain same:

*3.12 Naming or renaming a Street, or assigning a Ceremonial Name to a Street, on behalf of an individual, event, or an organization requires the written consent of the named party or the named party's representative.*

*3.12.1 In circumstances where consent has not been received, the City, in the absence of any refusal to provide consent or legal concerns, may approve the name if it is satisfied that reasonable efforts have been made to obtain consent.*

The following demonstrates the efforts made to obtain consent:

*Email from applicant, dated October 17, 2023 summarizing the following consent efforts:*

- *Ancestry.ca*
- *Family Search.org*
- *Professor Martha Cutler via Adam Wynn – research notes consulted*
- *Rory Rennick – book author*

*The consensus after the research above and in communications with Professor Cutler and Rory Rennick is there are no living descendants that wish to be named, to provide consent.*

This naming proposal will proceed under Section 3.12.1

### **Henry Box Brown Historical Research**

*Henry “Box” Brown (c. 1815 Luisa County, Virginia- June 15, 1897 Toronto, Ontario) was born into slavery in Virginia. In August 1848, Mr. Brown’s wife, Nancy and their three children were suddenly sold to a slave owner in North Carolina. The loss of his family lead Henry into deep mourning which cemented his resolve to escape enslavement.*

*Henry Brown conceived of a plan to ship himself to freedom with the help of members of the Underground Railroad. A shipping crate measuring approximately 3 feet long, 2.5 feet deep, and 2 feet wide was constructed. On March 23, 1849 Henry Brown was shipped from Richmond, Virginia to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The journey took 27 hours. The only things that Mr. Brown took with him in the box were water, a few crackers, and a gimlet to bore more air holes in the box if needed. During the journey, Henry Brown spent several hours upside and endured rough handling. Upon arriving in Philadelphia, the crate was delivered to the Anti-Slavery Office where a small group of abolitionists had gathered. Once the box was opened Henry Brown emerged a free man.*

*After attaining his freedom, Mr. Brown began participating in the abolitionist movement. Mr. Brown commissioned a moving panorama depicting the reprehensible conditions of slavery, which became a feature in his public engagements. The US government adopted the Fugitive Slave Act in 1850. This law enabled the capture and return to*

*enslavement of Black people living in Northern States. To ensure his continued freedom, Henry Box Brown sailed to England in October 1850 with his friend James Smith and the moving panorama. Once settled in England, Henry Box Brown published an autobiography, Narrative of the Life of Henry Box Brown, Written by Himself (1851) to share the realities of slavery in the United States and highlight his dramatic escape in a box. Mr. Brown leaned into showmanship and started including magic, hypnosis, and music in his shows. In 1859 he married Jane Floyd. The couple had two surviving children, Edward and Annie.*

*In 1875, the Brown family returned to the United States. The family lived in New England and Michigan until the early 1880s. In 1881 or 1882 the Brown family moved to Canada, settling in London, Ontario for a few years. Henry Box Brown, with Jane and their daughter Annie, gave performances across southwestern Ontario. The Brown family then moved to Toronto in 1886. They lived at what is now 42 Bright Street from 1886 to 1893. The City of Toronto Tax Rolls and Street Directories indicate that Mr. Brown was listed lecturer, music teacher, traveler, concert conductor, and professor of animal magnetism. The various occupations attributed to Mr. Brown indicate that he continued to operate as a showman through the end of his life in 1897. Henry Box Brown is buried in the Necropolis.*

*Henry Box Brown was a charismatic and resourceful person who continually sought a better life. He was able to use his daring escape and subsequent fame to share firsthand accounts of the horrors of slavery in the American South. However, escaping enslavement did not prevent Mr. Brown from experiencing racial injustice throughout his life. Legal records in England and Canada indicate that Mr. Brown sought justice when prejudice hindered his livelihood and well-being. Henry Box Brown's story continues to be captivating, inspiring a number of memorials, plays, books, and museum exhibits in contemporary society.*

*Recognizing Henry Box Brown's presence in Toronto adds important depth to Toronto's Black History. Mr. Brown's well-publicized escape from enslavement, and his involvement with the abolition movement position him as a key figure in nineteenth century Black History. Mr. Brown's flare for showmanship and his international career as a performing artist demonstrates his resiliency.*

Complete Historical Research Report is available upon request.

The proposed name has been circulated for comment and is acceptable to Toronto Police Service, Toronto Fire Services, and Toronto Paramedic Services.

Councillor Moise, Ward 13 - Toronto Centre, has provided support on July 13, 2023.

Community support was demonstrated via signed petition letters from property owners/residents who directly abut the lane. This naming proposal has the support of The Corktown Residents & Business Association and The Ontario Black History Society.

Community Councils have delegated authority to decide street naming matters which comply with the City of Toronto Street Naming Policy.

The public lane is shown as PART 1 on Attachment No.1 Sketch No. **PS-2023-024**.

## **CONTACT**

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## **SIGNATURE**

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Avi Bachar, P. Eng., Director, Engineering Support Services, Engineering and Construction Services

## **CONTACT**

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Cheryl Blackman, Director, Museums & Heritage Services, Telephone: 416 392-9135, Email: [Cheryl.Blackman@toronto.ca](mailto:Cheryl.Blackman@toronto.ca)

## **SIGNATURE**

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Patrick Tobin, General Manager, Economic Development & Culture

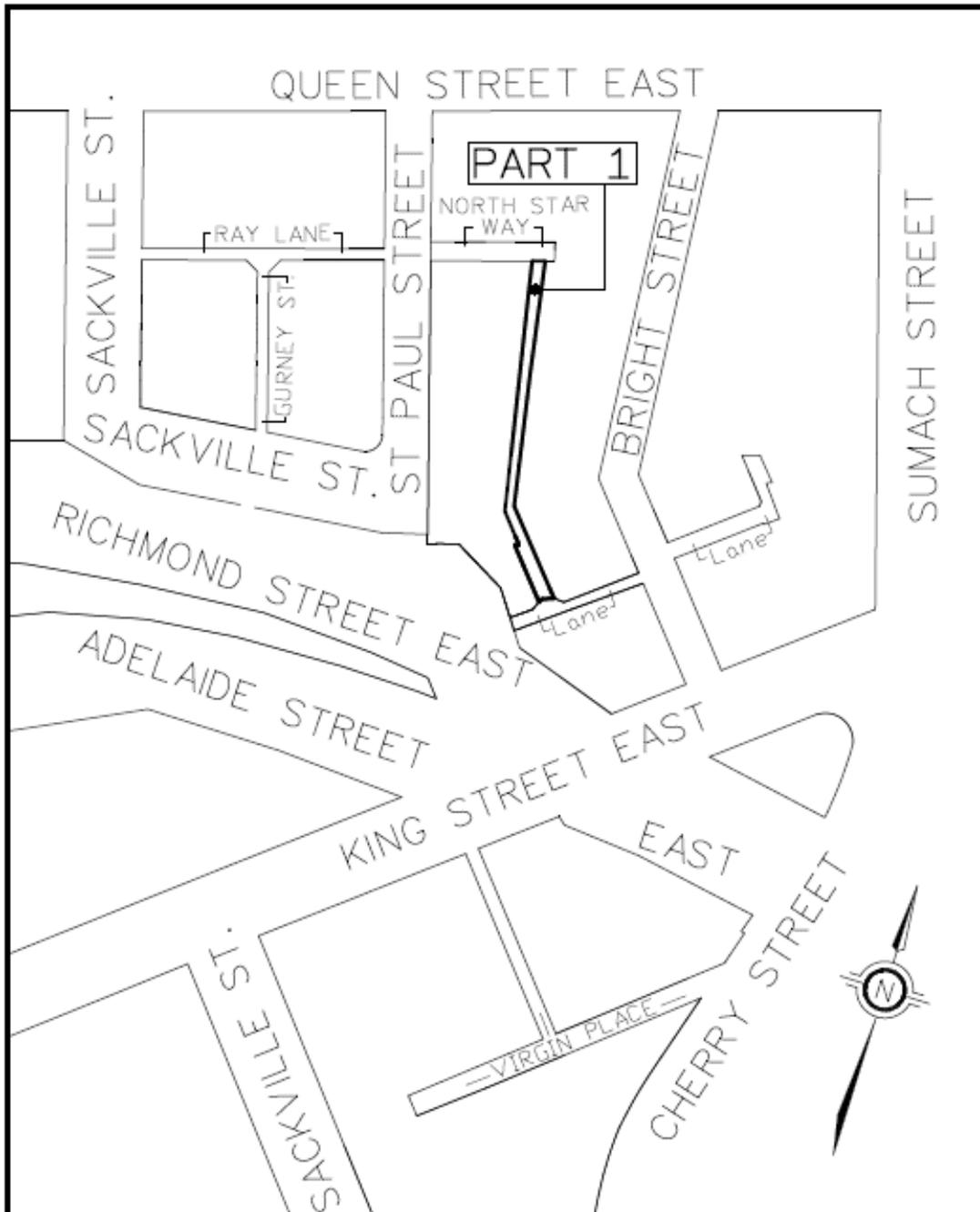
## **ATTACHMENTS**

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Attachment No. 1 Sketch No. **PS-2023-024**

Attachment No. 1 Sketch No. **PS-2023-024**

Showing the location of an existing public lane located east of St Paul Street, extending southerly of North Star Way



 ENGINEERING & CONSTRUCTION SERVICES ENGINEERING SUPPORT SERVICES LAND & PROPERTY SURVEYS	<p>PROPERTY INFORMATION SHEET</p> <p>NAMING OF A EXISTING PUBLIC LANE EAST OF ST PAUL STREET, EXTENDING SOUTHERLY FROM NORTH STAR WAY</p>
<p>NOTE: THIS SKETCH HAS BEEN COMPILED FROM OFFICE RECORDS. MEASUREMENTS ARE APPROXIMATE</p>	
<p>CHECK BY: R. SEGUIN PREPARED BY: S. LOMBARDO</p>	

WARD 13 - TORONTO CENTRE  
DATE: OCTOBER 5, 2023

SKETCH No. PS-2023-024