

City Council

Notice of Motion

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| MM28.18 | ACTION | | | Ward: 13 |
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Authorization to Release Section 37 Funds for Cy McLean Heritage Plaque - by Councillor Chris Moise, seconded by Deputy Mayor Ausma Malik

** 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 Chris Moise, seconded by Deputy Mayor Ausma Malik, recommends that:

1. City Council increase the 2025 Operating Budget for Heritage Toronto on a one-time basis by \$10,000 gross, \$0 net, fully funded by Section 37 community benefits obtained in the development at 203 Jarvis Street (Source Account: XR3026-3701111), secured for local area streetscape improvements, for the production and installation of a heritage plaque recognizing Cy McLean at 201 Yonge Street (Cost Centre: HG0001).

Summary

I am writing to request support to release section 37 funds to create a heritage plaque recognizing Cy McLean at the former site of the Colonial Tavern at 201 Yonge Street. Following a request from a local resident, my office was approached by Heritage Toronto for funding to celebrate Cy McLean's history in our city.

One of Toronto's first black bandleaders, Cyril (Cy) McLean was a Canadian pianist whose career spanned several decades from 1940s to the 1970s. He is particularly notable as having led Canada's only full-scale Black orchestra in the 1940s.

McLean was born in Sydney, Nova Scotia, the son of an immigrant West Indian steelworker. He took violin lessons until his brother taught him enough piano that he was able to land a job with a visiting band. When the band left town, Cy went with them.

During World War II, McLean and seven other musicians toured southern Ontario supported by Lifebuoy Soap. The band were sometimes barred from performing in segregated restaurants and were denied entry into the musicians' union. In 1947, McLean's quartet opened the new Colonial Tavern at 201 Yonge Street. The landmark show helped end restrictions that prevented many Black musicians performing at bars and clubs in Toronto.

An influence on many musicians facing racial barriers, McLean later moved to the Corsair, and later to the El Mocambo. He ended his career at the Warwick Hotel at Dundas and Jarvis Streets.

Heritage Toronto will work to install this plaque in 2026, to align with both the 110th anniversary of Cy McLean's birth and 40th anniversary of his death.

Background Information (City Council)

Member Motion MM28.18