

City Council

Notice of Motion

MM28.19	ACTION			Ward: 13
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Authorization to Release Section 37 Funds for Henry “Box” Brown 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 46 to 48 Power Street, and 113 to 125 Parliament Street (Source Account: XR3026-3701033), secured for local streetscape improvements in the area designated Corktown Area of Special Identity, for the production and installation of a heritage plaque recognizing Henry "Box" Brown at Henry “Box” Brown Lane (Cost Centre: HG0001).

Summary

I am writing to request support to release section 37 funds to create a heritage plaque recognizing Henry Brown at the placed in the [newly named laneway in Corktown](#) of the same name. My office was approached by Heritage Toronto about educating residents about their historical significance and to explain the significance of Henry Brown at the laneway.

Heritage Toronto approached my office seeking funding for several new heritage plaques in Ward 13. The City renames laneways frequently, but rarely provide context for residents as to who the person is and why they are being honored. A heritage plaque is a relatively inexpensive placemaking tool to promote our city’s history and educate the general public about notable historical figures.

Henry Brown, born into slavery in Louisa County, Virginia in 1815, earned the nickname “Box” after famously escaping by hiding in a wooden shipping crate marked “Philadelphia, PA: This Side Up With Care.”

After gaining freedom in Philadelphia, he became an abolitionist speaker, magician, hypnotist, singer, phrenologist, and ventriloquist. Brown would reenact his dramatic escape for audiences in Canada, England, and the United States.

Brown listed his occupation in city records as “Lecturer,” “Traveller,” and “Professor of Animal Magnetism.” In 1886, he moved to Toronto with his family, where they participated in

community events like a benefit concert at St. Lawrence Hall.

In his later years, Brown continued to perform around Canada, spending some of his final years in a Corktown house on Bright Street near the laneway bearing his name now. He died in 1897 and is buried in the Toronto Necropolis.

The laneway that backs his former house was renamed as Henry “Box” Brown Lane on February 1, 2024.

Background Information (City Council)

Member Motion MM28.19