

Renaming Brookwell Park in Memory of Estella A. Wheeler

Date: June 18, 2026

To: North York Community Council

From: General Manager, Parks and Recreation

Wards: Ward 6 - York Centre

SUMMARY

At the June 2024 City Council meeting, City Council requested through item 2024.MM19.7 that the General Manager, Parks and Recreation review the request to rename an existing or name a newly planned community garden in honour of the late Estella Wheeler.

Parks and Recreation, along with Economic Development and Culture Division, worked in collaboration with Strategic Partnerships and the local Councillor to consult with the family of Estella Wheeler and the local community to identify an appropriate location to commemorate Estella Wheeler's life and community impact. The proposal to rename Brookwell Park, located at 44 Streamdale Court, as *Estella A. Wheeler Park* advances the City's broader equity and commemorative objectives by recognizing the contributions of historically underrepresented individuals, while supporting more inclusive storytelling in public spaces in alignment with the City's Commemorative Framework.

Parks and Recreation, in collaboration with Economic Development and Culture Division and Strategic Partnerships reviewed the application to name the property. The review concluded that the naming proposal complies with the criteria of the City of Toronto Property Naming Policy and aligns with the Guiding Principles for Commemoration, as outlined in the City of Toronto's Commemorative Framework.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The General Manager, Parks and Recreation recommends that:

1. North York Community Council adopt the renaming of Brookwell Park, located at 44 Streamdale Court, to "Estella A. Wheeler Park".

FINANCIAL IMPACT

Funding for the costs associated with the production and installation of the new park sign will be accommodated within the 2026 Operating Budget for Parks and Recreation.

The Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer has reviewed this report and agrees with the financial implications as identified in the Financial Impact section.

DECISION HISTORY

At its meeting on June 26 and 27, 2024, City Council adopted motion MM19.7 – Request to Rename and Existing or Planned Community Garden After the Late Estella Wheeler.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2024.MM19.7>

At its meeting on July 19, 2022, City Council adopted the City of Toronto Commemorative Framework and approved revisions to the Property Naming Policy.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2022.EX34.6>

COMMENTS

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

In 2024, City Council directed Parks, Forestry and Recreation (now Parks and Recreation) to rename an existing or planned community garden after the late Estella Wheeler (2024.MM.19.7).

After consultations with the local community, Councillor, and family, a formal application was submitted to Strategic Partnerships to consider renaming Brookwell Park. Parks and Recreation consulted with Strategic Partnerships and Economic Development and Culture (EDC) to review this proposal. The application included a biography, evidence of community engagement, and letters of support. City staff have confirmed that the proposed naming aligns with the City of Toronto Property Naming Policy.

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

The following summarizes EDC's research and review of the proposed name, undertaken in accordance with the City's Guiding Principles for Commemoration.

The application to rename Brookwell Park at 44 Streamdale Court, near Sheppard Avenue West and Keele Street, "Estella A. Wheeler Park" provides substantive evidence of Estella Wheeler's (1959–2024) community contributions, citing her work as a teacher and commitment to supporting students at Toronto's Africentric Alternative School, and fostering civic engagement among youth.

Staff research indicates that Estella Wheeler was a Jamaican immigrant who arrived in Canada in 2008. She had over 40 years of experience as an educator in both Jamaica and Canada. After immigrating to Canada, Wheeler completed a Bachelor of Arts degree with *cum laude* honours from York University. She subsequently worked at several schools within the Toronto District School Board, including seven years at Africentric Alternative School, where she taught Grades 7 and 8.

The applicant emphasizes Estella Wheeler's commitment to fostering civic engagement, leadership, and stewardship among her students. Her teaching incorporated lessons on civil rights leaders, activism, women's history, and societal issues impacting women. For example, Wheeler highlighted the City Council item "Declaring Gender-Based Violence and Intimate Partner Violence an Epidemic in the City of Toronto" (2023.CC8.2) in her lessons.

She encouraged civic engagement and participation among her students through activities such as meet-and-greets with local elected officials, letter-writing campaigns, and annual visits to Toronto City Council. Wheeler also established the Africentric Alternative School's Student Council, including representatives from every grade (Kindergarten to Grade 8). Outside of her professional work, Ms. Wheeler was an active member of the West Toronto Church of God.

Estella Wheeler was found deceased on March 6, 2024. Estella Wheeler's contributions to her communities were formally recognized at the City of Toronto's March 20, 2024 City Council meeting, wherein her passing was acknowledged with a moment of silence.

The applicant states that, following Afro-Caribbean traditions, the park will serve as a physical place of peace and reflection. The dedication of the park will also align with Estella Wheeler's belief, as described in the application, "in the power of community and the need for spaces that promote healing and reflection."

The application demonstrates broad community support through an online petition led by the Africentric Alternative School community. The petition was available internationally, garnering 826 signatures in total. This includes 309 signatures from Toronto residents; of those, 35 are from the area near Brookwell Park. The remaining 517 signatures are from other Ontario cities, provinces, and countries, including the United States, Jamaica, and United Kingdom. The application included 26 letters of support from individuals and community organizations, including the following organizations: Caribbean African Canadian Social Services, Delta Family and Youth Support Centre, Jane and Finch Family Centre, Big Brothers Big Sisters, Story Planet, TDSB Superintendent of Education- Family of Schools 5, YWCA Toronto, Africentric Alternative School Parent Council, and the school communities of Africentric Alternative School and Sheppard Public School.

In summary, the application details and City staff research confirm Estella A. Wheeler's contributions as an educator and community member and demonstrate community support. The proposed renaming of Brookwell Park in her honour serves as a lasting recognition of her impact.

Recommended Park

Brookwell Park (44 Streamdale Court)

Brookwell Park is an existing small park near Sheppard Avenue West and Keele Street featuring a basketball court and a children's playground. The local Councillor, the family, as well as the local school community where Estella taught, all expressed support for renaming Brookwell Park due to its proximity to the Africentric Alternative School.

CONTACT

Donna Kovachis, Director, Parks, Parks and Recreation Tel: 416-392-7911,
Donna.Kovachis@toronto.ca

Shiralee Hudson Hill, Director (Acting), Museums and Heritage Services, Economic Development and Culture Tel: 416-396-4802, Shiralee.HudsonHill@toronto.ca

SIGNATURE

Terry Ricketts
General Manager,
Parks and Recreation