

Date: 2022-04-09

Subject: **Response to Council Referred Matter C095-2022: Recognition for Blackburn Family**

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Report Number: Corporate Support Services-2022-399

Recommendations:

1. That the report titled **Response to Council Referred Matter C095-2022: Recognition for Blackburn Family**, to the Committee of Council Meeting, dated April 30, 2022, be received.
2. That Council approve the installation of a metal bench, a documentary, and a tree planting in honour of Estelle Blackburn and her family with signage near the bench to educate the public about her contributions to the community.
3. That the Park remain named Beatty-Fleming Park in honour of Mary Beatty and Abigail Fleming.

Overview:

- On March 9, 2022, at a Committee of Council Meeting, Council passed a motion “*That staff report back to Council on a plan to recognize the Blackburn Family as the first modern-day Black family to settle in the city of Brampton in 1957 and recognize the contribution Estelle Blackburn made to the community while being the president of the Ladies Auxiliary; That the plan include but is not limited to the renaming of Beatty-Fleming Park, a documentary, and a historic plaque.*”
- This proposal recognizes the contributions of Estelle Blackburn with a commemorative bench, tree planting, and historic signage in her namesake at Beatty-Fleming Park while keeping the park’s naming convention in recognition of Mary Beatty and Abigail Fleming. Additionally, a short documentary about the Blackburn family will also be produced for the website and archives.

- The City's Parks Maintenance & Operations division offers tree and bench dedications as a form of remembrance of a loved one, a celebration of a birth, honouring a retiree, or any other event that one feels should be commemorated by a living tribute.
- Staff recommend a tree planting and a metal bench in honour of Estelle Blackburn and her family with signage near the bench to educate the public about her contributions to the community.
- Furthermore, the Equity Office will work with the Blackburn family to document their rich history in Brampton with the support of the Strategic Communications, Culture and Events Office. The documentary will be shown on the Equity Office site on Brampton.ca.

Background:

On March 9, 2022, at a Committee of Council Meeting, Council passed a motion and resolution:

“Therefore, be it resolved:

That staff report back to Council on a plan to recognize the Blackburn Family as the first modern-day Black family to settle in the city of Brampton in 1957 and recognize the contribution Estelle Blackburn made to the community while being the president of the Ladies Auxiliary;

That the plan include but is not limited to the renaming of Beatty Fleming Park, a documentary, and a historic plaque; and

That this report come back to Council by end of April 2022.”

This proposal recognizes the contributions of Estelle Blackburn with a commemorative bench, tree planting, and historic signage in her namesake at Beatty-Fleming Park while keeping the park's naming convention in recognition of Mary Beatty and Abigail Fleming. Additionally, a short documentary about the family will also be produced for the website and archives.

About Beatty-Fleming Naming

Abigail Weir Fleming was born in Huttonville, April 28, 1898, to school teacher Robert Fleming and his wife Margaret. Mary Helen Beatty was born in Brampton on April 30, 1896. She was born to grain dealer William James “Bill” Beatty and his wife Annie.

The Beatty family was particularly active in city life. Bill Beatty served Brampton in various volunteer capacities¹ including Mayor (1920 and 1921, returned by acclamation),² and County warden (equivalent to Regional Chair, 1927), and volunteering as captain and assistant chief of the Brampton Fire Department.³ One of his sons was Brampton's first professional athlete, lacrosse legend Stewart "Stew" Beatty.⁴

Abigail and Mary became friends as children, before the Flemings left for Oxford County, when Robert Fleming got a teaching position there. They reunited as adults, both pursuing teaching.⁵ Beatty graduated from Toronto Teachers' College; Fleming graduated from Stratford Teachers' College.⁶

In September 1917, Abigail Fleming began teaching grade one at Central Public School. The same day, Mary Beatty began teaching grade three at Central Public School. They continued teaching these grades, continuously, until retiring from teaching in June 1957. This stability was unusual for the time. One of their retirement parties was attended by 80 colleagues from past and present, despite their school only having about 10 teachers at any time.⁷ *The Toronto Star* reported that they had "educated half the people in Brampton," by the time of their retirement. According to Mary Beatty, "every time we pick up a paper, we see names of successful figures who were our pupils."

About Estelle Blackburn and Family

The Blackburn family was the first modern-day Black family to move to the City of Brampton in 1957. They purchased their home for \$200.00 on Campbell Drive and were met with overt racism in the form of a petition to have the family removed from the neighbourhood.

Estelle Blackburn served as President of the Northwood Estates Ratepayers Association Ladies Axillary and helped to raise funds for play equipment and other amenities for the Northwood community at the park currently known as Beatty Fleming Park. Estelle is survived by her children Angela and Bobby Blackburn and Lenore Blackburn-Skinner.

Angela became the first Black student to attend Beatty Fleming Public School.

Current Situation:

¹ Political roles only provided stipends for cost, but otherwise were volunteer roles. As such, elections were held annually, and council terms were generally shorter.

² "All acclaimed in Brampton," *The Globe and Mail*, 30 December 1920, page 6.

³ "Pen Pictures of Peel Personages: No. 38, W. J. Beatty," *The Conservator*, 1926.

⁴ Beatty is best known for leading the Excelsiors to two amateur wins but played his final season of lacrosse for the Toronto Maple Leafs professional lacrosse team.

⁵ Kate Aitken, June 3, 1957, episode of *The Tambllyn Broadcast*.

⁶ "Honor Close Friends," *The Conservator*, undated clipping.

⁷ "Goodbye, Miss Chips: Taught 2,000 Brampton Pupils, Mary And Gail Are Retiring," *The Conservator*, June 6, 1957.

The City's Parks Maintenance & Operations division offers tree and bench dedications. As a form of remembrance of a loved one, celebration of a birth, honouring a retiree, or any other event which one feels should be commemorated by a living tribute. Staff recommend a tree planting and metal bench in honour of Estelle Blackburn and her family with signage near the bench to inform the public of her contributions to the community.

Recommended location for the heritage sign, tree and bench commemorating the history of the Blackburn Family is shown below with the red circle. The estimated completion time is Q3-2022.



Furthermore, the Equity Office will work with the Blackburn family to document their rich history in Brampton with support from the Strategic Communications Office which will be highlighted on the Equity Office site on Brampton.ca and social media.

Corporate Implications:

Strategic Communications, Culture and Events will support a corporate unveiling and a photo opportunity to celebrate the piece with no budget impact. The Equity Office will facilitate the execution of the documentary and add the finished product to Brampton.ca/equity.

Financial Implications

The estimated cost of the tree planting, commemorative bench and historic signage is \$10,000. Sufficient funding is available from the following capital project:

Initiative	Project
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The documentary will be completed by internal staff, and sufficient funding is available in the 2022 Strategic Communications, Culture and Events operating budget.

Term of Council Priorities:

This report supports the Term of Council Priority Brampton is a Mosaic by promoting and demonstrating its inclusivity through the Parks commemoration program.

Conclusion:

The City of Brampton is proud to offer recognition programs and commemorations that celebrate Brampton's diversity and pay homage to its rich cultural history for families like the Blackburn's.

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