

Subject: Brightside Park - Facility Naming Sub-Committee - Presentation - 2:30pm, Thursday May 27th, 2021

... Madam Chairperson, and members of the Facility Naming Sub - Committee:

... thank you for this opportunity to meet with you! ...

... this is Thursday, May 27th, 2021 ... my name is John Michaluk, I was born on Brightside in 1942 ... I am a first generation Canadian, my parents Jennie and Stefan Michaluk were Ukrainians and as a child, that was the language spoken in our home at 48 Lancaster Street, Hamilton, ON ...

... (PEACE - LOVE signs!) ... thanks to the City, the deaf and hard of hearing are able to access on YouTube the information presented here this afternoon ...

... on Lancaster Street, in Brightside, our next door neighbours on both sides were Italian ... two doors down was my best friend of 78 years, John Brodnicki - his family was Polish ... across the street, our neighbours came from England ...

... five homes, four languages, fourteen children, three different religious beliefs, significant cultural differences, and a delightful variety of world foods! ...

... we were multicultural before multicultural was a word - or a government program! ...

... we were ethnic, ethical, and guided by a strong work ethic ...

... we highly valued - family, close friends, trust, and caring for each other ...

... none of our parents finished high school, most never completed grade school ...

... but all could walk to work at the steel mills, the chemical company, tractor company, tire company, the toothpaste and detergent company, and the pottery that made the dishes and cups we used at dinner - or, whose rejects were lovingly gifted to our mother on her birthday! ...

... although not formally schooled our parents learned the language, and how to go along to get along, on both the factory floor and the street - but they knew encouraging us kids to continue our schooling and working hard would pay off ...

... as kids, we played on the streets, at the City dump, along the railway and street car tracks, and in the winter we spent every weekend on the frozen pond of a company whose waste water flowed into it - one end never froze because of the toxic chemicals, the acids and oily lubricants ... the smallest kid always had to retrieve the puck if it got too close to the open water! ...

... any company - whether it makes steel, produces nuclear power, or factory-farmed chickens - can be profitable if it doesn't have to account for the cost of the waste products it produces! ...

... we played outside every day until the street lights came on and it was time to go home - 5pm in the winter but after 9pm around this time of year ... every vacant lot was a field of dreams or, a vegetable plot (now known as a "community garden"!) ... the older kids looked after the younger ones and every mother kept an eye on every other mother's kids ...

... leaving the neighbourhood to attend high school opened our world ... we discovered City parks - Eastwood, Scott's, Gage, Woodlands! ... these were amazing places - clean, green, large, full of life, excitement, other kids, and facilities! ... we never knew how these places got their names but we knew they were special and different from Brightside ... nobody had a car - we walked for miles, rode our bikes, maybe sometimes took a bus to get there ...

... we knew parks were a special place! ... a place to meet, hang out, learn, play sports, and be happy ...

... in our teens, during the 1950's life was good ... most of us had part time jobs while going to school - delivering the newspaper, working at the drugstore, the grocery store, ice cream shop, the bowling alley ...

... or, in the summertime, working on farms picking fruit for the farmer who at 6am, stopped on our street to pick up a dozen or so teenagers, load them onto the back of an old farm truck with wooden side wall racks, and with us standing up in the back, he drove us to a farm on Nash Road or Mount Albion Road to pick the crop ...

... now, with government subsidies, "pickers" get flown in from the Caribbean or Latin America! ...

... in addition to school and part-time work many of us - boys and girls - played sports year round in the High School and/or City leagues ...

... family, friends, school, work, sports - from the late 1930's until the late '60's - life was good on Brightside! ...

... everybody worked hard, did their best to prosper and to stay healthy and look out for each other! ...

... we were proud to be Hamiltonians in the "Ambitious City" ...

... .but, like the turkey who lived indoors, sheltered from the weather, in a huge barn, with access to clean water, and good food, until just a couple of weeks before Thanksgiving Day, for us, everything was about to come to an end! ...

... by the 1960's for the 1000 or so Brightsiders, now living in fewer than 260 homes and businesses, mostly built with their own hands, life was about to horribly change ...

... behind closed doors, decisions were being made by "the big shots" that would inextricably alter Brightside for ever! ...

... the planners, elected City Councillors, their consultants, academics, unwitting dupes, and willing sycophants, together with steel company executives, and local profiteers decided the area needed:

- bigger parking lots
- wider roadways and,
- an overpass to ensure unencumbered and faster access to and from the steel mill! ...

... and so, the City and the steel company and its agents began, quietly at first, to buy up homes and businesses, sometimes renting them out but, mostly bulldozing them and covering the now empty lots over with crushed slag, a stone-like, by-product produced in the blast furnaces only a couple of hundred metres away ... the flattened lots were a convenient dumping ground for slag ...

... by around 1968, the City and the industrialists had slowly but steadily bulldozed all but 24 of the homes and businesses and covered the space with slag which today still envelopes, and defines the formerly green - now drab, grey-brown, landscape ... Brightside, once touted as a model neighbourhood, had been decapitated ...

... long-time neighbours, some close friends for generations, and several extended families who lived within walking distance, moved to homes scattered throughout the City ...

... some of the elderly who had lived in the self-contained, small community all their lives and had only known the familiar streets, corner grocery stores, and other service providers within Brightside, were dispersed and forced to establish new lives in unfamiliar neighbourhoods ...

... comfort, trust, familiarity, and respect evaporated to be replaced by a sense of betrayal ... some, never adjusted to the disruption of their lives ...

... but, there is an old saying - "the sun never shines on the same dog's tail every day!" ... soon after the homes were destroyed and the people displaced:

- the economies of the steel, rubber, soap, chemical, and farm implement industries all changed for the worst ...
- comparative advantages dissipated, factors of production were altered, and trade alliances were shattered ...
- our City leaders were thinking locally when the world was being altered globally ...
- soon, business decided Hamilton wasn't the profit haven it had been ...
- they all moved out of town ...
- leaving the City with a double whammy - significantly decreased property tax revenue and increased expenses to clean up their environmental mess !...

... since then, the parking lots have always sat empty of cars ... the widened roadways have never carried vehicles at the capacity envisioned, and the overpass - the bridge to nowhere - stands prominently like the spine of some ancient reptile ... a harsh-looking, ugly monument to the folly of short sightedness and flawed decision making! ...

... btw, there's another old saying, "a good deal has a thousand fathers, and a bad deal is an orphan" ...

... you can't find anyone who takes credit for the design and build of Industrial Drive, the plethora of parking lots, the Overpass to nowhere, and the flattening of more than 200+ homes and businesses ...

... not surprisingly, the project never had a name or, an author of the plan and nobody has ever proudly taken claim or credit for the scheme! ...

... somehow, through all of this, and for fifty years since the bulldozers plowed our neighbourhood under, a now aging band of Brightsiders, although scattered throughout the land, has ALWAYS - ALWAYS remained together as close friends ...

... a considerable level of trust and caring about each other develops when you've known someone for over 75 years, or bowled with them for over 50 years in the Brightside Bowling League! ...

... those of us who were born and raised on Brightside are a vanishing species ... HEAR OUR VOICE

... we speak from the heart ... we're neck deep and heartfelt in our beliefs when it comes to Brightside ...

... for decades, we've been advocating in our City and elsewhere for recognition of our neighbourhood's history, heritage, and way of life ...

... for decades, we've been telling our story about hard working, persevering immigrant parents, sacrificing to ensure their children had opportunities ...

... help us to celebrate, venerate, and commemorate an important neighbourhood in our City ...

... help our City's children, and our City's children's children, the young people, the immigrants, and long-time Hamiltonians, to remember Brightside and its people ...

... more importantly, give the children and the youth of our City a place to play, to learn, to build strong, healthy bodies, and minds ... and to make lifelong friends! ...

... repurpose the Glass Works property into the very best, highly functional, multi-dimensional, totally accessible, and beautiful Park, Canada has ever known ...

... let the Park be a jewel in our City - let it stand beside the other parks of Hamilton in the wonderful tradition of being a meeting place, a storytelling haven, and a timeless memory maker for generation after generation to come ... HEAR OUR VOICE ...

... what better name for a Park that serves all peoples, all dreams, all hopes, and all aspirations? ...

... what better name for a Park that embodies the spirit of new beginnings? ...

... what better name for a Park that might fly the flags of all countries from which people come to start anew?

... BRIGHTSIDE PARK - what better name to inspire the people of our "Distinguished City?"...

... and finally, now that there is Brightside Park, let's remember that right now, there is still a place, a neighbourhood, a space known as BRIGHTSIDE ... with real homes, real people, real history ... in a sense, it's the ancestral home of Brightsiders ...

... rightfully, in every written communique emanating from City Hall, recognition is given to the ancestral homes of peoples who formerly made the City Hall area their home ...

... so too, should the still remaining lands of Brightside be honoured and remembered in some way! ...

... the people living there today are proud, caring, hardworking Hamiltonians, with pride of place ...

... it's time for a renaissance to begin there ...

... and a time to end the "lesser than" treatment! ...

... Brightside deserves extra care to ensure sidewalks, roadways and all City services are delivered there with the highest quality, quantity, and timeliness ...

... maybe, get out the paint, add murals, plant some greenery – and why aren't there flower beds in our City below Barton Street? ...

... and maybe Burlington Street between Wilcox and Gage Ave should be renamed Brightside Way ... let's remember, Tesla never lived on Burlington Street, and the City named part of the street after him and a car! - is there another street in the City named after an automobile? ... other than Plymouth Street in Brightside, long ago buried by the bulldozers? ...

... and neighbourhood signs dot the City, announcing important neighbourhoods - Durand, Corktown, Crown Point, the North End - Brightside has earned its right to stand with other important Hamilton neighbourhoods with a sign designating its significance ...

... and maybe, an historical marker should be placed, in a small parkette within Brightside itself, to recognize the significance of the workers from Brightside who for decades were the backbone of the City's factories ...

... and in our City, initiatives to preserve historical homes such as Whitehearn, Westfield Village, Dundurn, Griffin House, and others have always been important undertakings ... maybe some worker's homes in Brightside should be protected, preserved, and designated historical ... they're the last, believe it or not, of a once leading edge, model community in our City ...

... and lastly, maybe before it's too late, digital sound and visual records might be created to preserve Brightside's voices, images, history, and contribution to the City ...

... a part of the soul and heart of Hamilton was born on Brightside ... now, thanks to all of you on the Facility Naming Sub-Committee, that spirit will live on for generations at BRIGHTSIDE PARK! ... HEAR OUR VOICE! ...

... if you have questions, I would be pleased, through the Chair, to respond ...

... if not, thank you for providing this opportunity to meet with you to share a part of our City's mostly unknown past ...

... hopefully some of the information provided will be of assistance and support your reasons for choosing the Park's name? ...

... you have a chance to make an historically profound decision ...

... one that will be remembered for generations ...

... you are the fortunate people who can choose the name of our neighbourhood for a beautiful, breakthrough, wonderful place named BRIGHTSIDE PARK ...

... we're grateful and appreciative of your consideration ... thank you! ...