

Moise's park name change turning a unifier into a divider, predecessor says

Kristyn Wong-Tam says the process that was used to rename a parkette in the Toronto Centre ward is at odds with the spirit of activist Louis March.

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Sumach-Shuter Parkette is due for a grand reopening in July 2025. Inset, local MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam.

Toronto Centre's MPP says Councillor Chris Moise has picked the right name for the wrong park.

Kristyn Wong-Tam, Moise's predecessor as councillor for the ward, told the Toronto Sun that late activist Louis March is certainly worthy of the honour of having his name on a city park, but the "way too small" Sumach-Shuter Parkette is not a fit.

"If the spirit of Louis March was to bring people together to create dialogue and to encourage social cohesion, this park will probably be a bit undersized," Wong-Tam said.

The renaming, announced at last month's council meeting, has rankled a number of people in the neighbourhood who argued it was imposed by Moise without any real consultation. Wong-Tam lamented that this rift in Toronto

Centre is serving as a “distraction” from March’s anti-violence message.

The Sumach-Shuter Parkette, known locally as Stinky’s park, is due for a grand reopening on July 20. The park has been redesigned, with an oversized dog park and a new playground.

That redesign involved plenty of community feedback and took years of work, much of it before Wong-Tam jumped into provincial politics in 2022. “I don’t recall ever a desire to rename the park at that time,” she said.

The idea to rename the parkette after March, who died last year, began with the group Mothers of Peace Regent Park.

The group’s founder, Sureya Ibrahim, said March was a “selfless” advocate who did so much for grieving mothers who lost their sons to violence. “He’s been missed so dearly,” she said.

Mothers of Peace initially wanted to rename Regent Park’s namesake green space, but widened their scope and decided the revamped parkette made sense, Ibrahim said.

While the idea of renaming Regent Park’s green space might surprise some Torontonians, Regent Park locals who spoke with the Sun said everyone in the area calls it the “big park” – “which is why it’s always been right for some type of renaming, just because it does get very

confusing when you have to say, 'it's the Regent Park inside Regent Park,'" Wong-Tam said.

March spent "a lot of time" in the big park, she noted, adding that it would be better to borrow the name of someone who brought people together at a large open space rather than the cramped Sumach-Shuter Parkette.

Although his reach spanned the city, Wong-Tam said, "I think Louis' heart is in Regent Park, knowing him and how he cared deeply for the Regent community."

Neighbours opposed to the parkette renaming have started an online petition that calls for "meaningful consultation." Nearly 1,000 people have signed it – more than the Mothers of Peace petition that Moise previously told the Sun was part of the justification for the new name. (Moise did not respond to a request for comment for this article.)

What those neighbours don't appear to have done is to have won the attention of City Hall. Bill Eadie, one of the renaming opponents, told the Sun they delivered a letter and the petition to council on Wednesday morning, but there was nothing on the published agenda to suggest councillors might reconsider last month's landslide vote.

Walied Khogali Ali, co-chairman of the Regent Park Neighbourhood Association, said the parkette renaming has become a big issue in the area because of the lack of consultation.

"There's none," Khogali Ali said. "The city is not claiming that. They went to city council directly, right? There was no opportunity for deputations at any space. Consultation requires a two-way form of communication."

Khogali Ali also knew March personally – "He's a good friend. He's a hero," he said – and said his name isn't the issue. "It's about respecting community voices."

But Ibrahim expressed frustration that anyone might want to change the plan with the parkette grand opening now so close. She added that her group has followed all the rules and said it's "not fair to blame" Moise for trying to honour March's legacy.

Anti-violence activist Louis March

Louis March, a Toronto activist known for his opposition to gun violence, died in July 2024. PHOTO BY CHANGE.ORG

Wong-Tam has also heard the complaints from the neighbourhood, and has been "trying to direct the conversation to the councillor's office ... I did tell them that nothing was going to change unless the councillor wanted it to change."

"I can't do what he has the authority to do," Wong-Tam said, "but I think that a strong leader in this case would bring the communities together."

"I did reach out to the councillor and I suggested that if he wants help, I will help him bring the communities together," the MPP added. "He told me that he's very

aware of this issue and he's working on it. ... He seemed very confident that he knew the issues."

Wong-Tam said it's upsetting to see March dividing a community rather than uniting it.

"One thing I do know about Louis, I know him well enough to know that he would not want to be mired in any type of community conflict and he would not want to be at the heart of a dispute. He is the kind of man who would want to bring people together. Whether he agrees with you or not, he recognizes that everyone's got a part of the solution in their hand," Wong-Tam said.

"I believe he would be quite disheartened if he knew that he's sort of caught in this dispute that wasn't his own making."

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