

Staff Report



To	General Committee
Subject	Request to Rename Berczy Street Park to Charlie O'Connor Park
Date	October 29, 2025
Ward	2
From	M. Banfield, RPP, Executive Director of Development Services
Executive Member Approval	M. Banfield, RPP, Executive Director of Development Services
CAO Approval	M. Prowse, Chief Administrative Officer
Staff Report #	DEV038-25

Recommendation(s):

1. That Berczy Street Park be renamed to Charlie O'Connor Park in recognition of local resident and businessman Charlie O'Connor who lived in the area and operated 'The Ideal Shoe Store' for more than 50 years.
 2. That staff organize the naming of the park, and any costs associated with to the change in name from Berczy Street Park to Charlie O'Connor Park, illustrated on Appendix A – Location Map attached to Staff Report DEV038-25, be assumed by the City of Barrie.
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Executive Summary:

The purpose of this staff report is to recommend that Berczy Street Park be renamed Charlie O'Connor Park. The park is generally located south of Berczy Street through to Mulcaster Street then further to Peel Street and north of Penetang Street, as shown on Appendix A – Location Map attached to Staff Report DEV038-25.

The name change was requested by an application submitted to the City and recommended for consideration by the Municipal Naming Working Group. Staff have investigated and determined that changing the name of Berczy Street Park to Charlie O'Connor Park will not diminish the importance and history of the Berczy name within the City as the street name will not be changed and further the name Charlie O'Connor would recognize a local resident that had a significant impact on the community.

Key Findings:

On July 17, 2024, Trudee Romanek and Sue (O'Connor) Rosil submitted an application to request that the name of Berczy Street Park be changed to Charlie O'Connor Park. The completed application is attached as Appendix B – Application Form Request to Rename Berczy Street Park to Charlie O'Connor Park to Staff Report DEV038-25.

The details of the application include reference to local resident and businessman Charlie O'Connor as living and operating his shoe store at 131 Berczy Street for over 35 years after moving from his Dunlop Street location. 'The Ideal Shoe Store' remained one of Barrie's primary sources of footwear during that time. As further illustrated in the newspaper articles attached as Appendix C to Staff Report DEV038-25, **Mr. O'Connor was recognized not just as a businessman but a great neighbour and friend, always engaging in conversation and willing to support the needs of his customers.**

The Municipal Naming Working Group reviewed the request, and subsequently supported the renaming of the Berczy Street Park to honour Charlie O'Connor. **Direction was subsequently provided to request that staff move forward with the process to request the final approval from Council to rename Berczy Street Park to Charlie O'Connor Park.**

Financial Implications:

If the recommendation is approved as included in Staff Report DEV038-25, it is anticipated that there will be minor financial implications for the Corporation as the costs associated with the renaming of this park shall be covered by the City and they include:

- new park name sign(s);
- any fee associated to changes on the City's systems (spatial and tabular databases);
- updates on maps and any visual products where this park name is displayed; and,
- required notification of any third parties in accordance with our process.

Alternatives:

The following alternative is available for consideration by General Committee:

Alternative #1 - General Committee could deny the application to request changing the name of Berczy Street Park to Charlie O'Connor Park.

This alternative is not recommended as there has been a formal request made by the Trudee Romanek and Sue (O'Connor) Rosil to recognize a local resident and businessman that had an impact on the community. The request has been accepted by the Municipal Naming Working Group and supported by staff, and a review process was completed following the Municipal Naming Policy without any objections from the public or implications for other properties in the area.

Strategic Plan Alignment:

Affordable Place to Live		
Community Safety		
Thriving Community	X	Recognizing contributions on the community
Infrastructure Investments		
Responsible Governance		

Additional Background Information and Analysis:

Berczy Street Park is a small urban park in the downtown area of Barrie; the location and boundaries of this park are illustrated in Appendix A – Location Map attached to Staff Report DEV038-25.

The renaming initiative aligns with the City’s commitment to celebrating individuals who have made meaningful impacts on the community; as Mr. O’Connor was a long-standing advocate for civic engagement and played a significant role in local initiatives that enhanced the quality of life for Barrie residents.

The Parks Planning team was consulted regarding this proposed name change and has no objection to the renaming of Berczy Street Park. The team investigated the history of the name ‘Berczy’ and determined that the intent of the commemoration is captured in the Berczy Street name.

As Berczy Street Park is a representation of its primary location on Berczy Street, **a name in commemoration of a local resident and businessman can be supported without renaming the park from a previous recognition of a community figure.**

Staff completed all of the steps required to facilitate the renaming of a park as outlined in the Municipal Naming Policy. The policy establishes the processes and criteria for naming, renaming, and dedicating Municipal Assets such as streets, parks and facilities as well as including the methods by which the public may provide suggestions and comments, such as the application submitted.

Consultation and Engagement:

The application submitted to request the renaming of Berczy Street Park to Charlie O’Connor Park was supported by the Municipal Naming Working Group in 2024.

Public notice for a 30-day comment period was provided on September 18, 2025. **No comments or concerns about the proposed change to the name of the park from Berczy Street Park to Charlie O’Connor Park were received.**

Environmental and Climate Change Impact Matters:

There are no environmental and/or climate change impact matters related to the recommendation.

Appendix:

Appendix A – Location Map

Appendix B – Application Form Request to Rename Berczy Street Park to Charlie O'Connor Park

Appendix C – News Articles Supporting the Nomination of the Name Charlie O'Connor

Report Author:

Olga Sanchez, Planning Services Technical Coordinator, Development Services

File #:

R01

Pending #:

Not Applicable

Appendix A - Location Map



Appendix B - Application Form Request to Rename Berczy Street Park to Charlie O'Connor Park



Municipal Naming Policy Including Application Form

Appendix "A" to the Municipal Naming Policy Naming Application Form

A. NOMINATOR'S INFORMATION	
Name (Individual or Organization):	
Mailing Address:	
Telephone:	E-mail:
B. INFORMATION CONCERNING THE PROPOSED NAME	
Proposed Name: Charlie O'Connor Park	
If the name suggested relates to the commemoration of an individual who is alive, please provide the individual's contact information in the section below. <i>Note: A Commemorative Name may be used only once in the City of Barrie – subsequent requests will be denied.</i>	
Name:	
Mailing Address:	
Telephone:	E-mail:
Applicable Criteria (select all applicable criteria):	
☒ The nominated name gives a sense of place, continuity, belonging and/or celebrates the distinguishing characteristics and uniqueness of Barrie	
☒ The nominated name maintains a long standing local area identification with the residents of Barrie	
☒ The nominated name promotes pride in the City of Barrie, acknowledges local heritage, history and/or recognizes unique features and geography	
☐ The rationale associated with the selection of the nominated would be understandable to the majority of Barrie residents	
☐ The nominated name recognizes the contributions of organizations such as a partnership with or without financial contribution	
☒ The nominated individual/family has demonstrated excellence, courage or exceptional service to the citizens of the City of Barrie, the Province of Ontario and/or Canada;	
☐ The nominated individual/family has an extraordinary community service record;	

For more information: City of Barrie
Legislative and Court Services Department
705-739-4220 Ext. 5500
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☒	The nominated individual/family has worked to foster equality and reduce discrimination;
☒	A direct relationship or association existed between the place of residence of or community efforts undertaken by the individual/family and the property, building or element to be named;
☐	The nominated individual has made a significant financial contribution to a park or facility, and the contribution significantly benefits the community that the park or facility serves (i.e., the park or facility may not have otherwise been possible without the financial assistance)
☒	The nominated name has historical significance
C. RATIONALE	
Please describe the rationale for Nomination and attach background information related to criterion chosen, which substantiates all claims made (include copies of newspaper articles, certificates, awards, letters of support or commendation, service records, pictures, etc.	
Charles O'Connor lived on Berczy Street for most of his life. Though he initially worked as a salesman at Ideal Shoes on Dunlop, he bought and moved the business into his Berczy Street home when the Dunlop St. landlord did not renew the lease. With minimal overhead, Charlie strove to provide quality shoes at prices hardworking folks could afford. Receipts show he did regular business with the Chippewa ladies of Rama for their handmade "buckskin" slippers. For three decades, Charlie was one of Barrie's primary sources of footwear. So many people recall getting their moccasins, saddle shoes, desert boots, PF Flyers, and other footwear from the cheerful and honest Charlie. Most say they always felt better leaving Charlie's than they had when they arrived. These customers also tell of him lending them money, cashing their "milk cheques," or extending single mothers credit so their kids would have new shoes for the first day of school. He'd say simply, "Pay me back when you can." Former fire chief Jack McAllister also attests to the fine character of Charlie O'Connor and states that he was the source of excellent boots for all Barrie firefighters. Charlie was so well-known and beloved that when he retired, in his eighties, the local paper ran an article on him. Numerous residents of Barrie at that time and even now, nearly 40 years after his death, still speak fondly of the man, with many expressing their support for renaming the park. What better way to honour the genuine kindness and integrity of this unsung local hero?	
Please note all information provided below and/or attached to this Application Form will form part of the Naming Application Form and will therefore be released to the public in any public notices/advertisements produced, public Agenda and Minutes, Committee discussions/meetings and Reports which may go forward to Council.	

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D: DO YOU WISH THE NAME TO BE USED FOR A:	
☒	Park
☐	Facility/Building
☐	Street
☐	Element of a Park or Facility (please describe): _____
☐	Any of the above
☐	Other (please describe): _____
1 st choice: To rename Berczy St. Park	
2 nd choice:	
E. IS THERE A PARTICULAR WARD OR PARK/FACILITY/STREET YOU WISH THE NAME TO BE USED FOR?	
1 st choice: Berczy Street Park as his home/shoe store was across the street from it.	
2 nd choice:	
F: RENAMING: (Please note that before a Renaming Application is accepted, the nominator must have written permission from the family or next of kin —if this application results in a request to displace an existing commemorative name [person, persons, or family]):	
Does the venue currently have a name? ☒ Yes ☐ No	
If yes, provide current name, details and rationale for the proposed renaming of this venue: Berczy Street Park is named thus due to its location. Toronto has a Berczy Park in as well, named for William Berczy, a German architect/surveyor who helped found Toronto, but I can find no specific ties between Berczy and the city of Barrie.	
G. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: (ADD INFORMATION AS NEEDED)	
The descendants of Charlie O'Connor, including his niece and all three grandchildren support this renaming in Charlie's honour.	
Nominator's Signature: _____	Date: July 17, 2024
Personal information about the Nominator contained on this form is collected pursuant to the Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, M.56, R.S.O. 1990 and will be used for the purposes of responding to your request. Questions about this collection should be directed to: the City Clerk, City of Barrie, 70 Collier Street, Barrie, Ontario, L4M 4T5, (705) 739-4204	

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Appendix C - News Articles Supporting the Nomination of the Name Charlie O'Connor



Charles (Gabby) O'Connor recalls a half century of selling shoes to Barrie and area residents.

'Gabby' closes shop

After 50 years, O'Connor knows shoes

If there's one man in Barrie who knows his shoes, it must be Charles O'Connor.

For 50 years he fitted local men, women and children with footwear, first from a tiny Dunlop Street store and for an even longer period from the back of his Berczy Street home.

In some local families, three generations have bought shoes, boots and slippers from the loquacious man many call "Gabby".

The "store" he used since 1948 until quite recently, was probably the most unusual shoe retailing operation in Barrie, but that didn't stop the customers from flocking in. O'Connor used a wooden shed at the back of his small residence for fitting customers; they'd sit down on a comfortable chesterfield while he would pick out their size shoes from the stock he had piled in the shed, the garage, and throughout his house.

BACK OF CAR

"I'd even keep some stock in a 1950 Dodge in the garage," O'Connor, 81, said as he sold off his remaining items in a close-out sale. "Of course I'd have to lock the doors and trunk at night so no one would steal them."

In winter, the unheated fitting room could be a little chilly and O'Connor often had to warm the new shoes over the kitchen stove before letting the customer try them on. Still, they kept flocking to his business because of his low prices.

"Sometimes they'd be lined up right outside the shed waiting their turn, but they didn't mind. They knew me for good quality and since I had almost no overhead, I could keep the prices down."

O'Connor got his start in the working world in a city grocery store, but after a few years found a job with Neil's shoe store. In 1933 he jumped at the chance to buy out Vern Beardsall's

shoe business and he opened in a half-store front next to the Queen's Hotel. The most unusual feature of that store was the entrance to the storeroom in the basement — a trap door located smack in the middle of the store.

"I had to keep shutting it so customers wouldn't fall down," O'Connor recalled. "Once a little girl did slip down but she wasn't hurt."

After 15 years on the main street, his landlord — who'd been renting the premises for \$28 a month — needed the store for his own purposes and O'Connor began operations from his residence.

HIS SECRET

The lack of overhead there, and a wise selection of stock, proved to be the secret of his business success, he said.

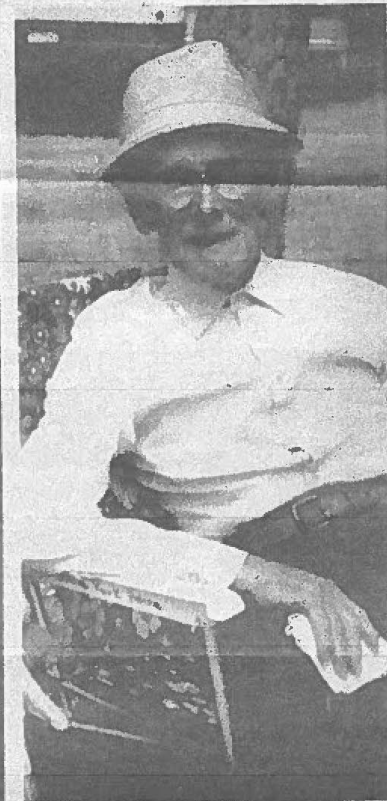
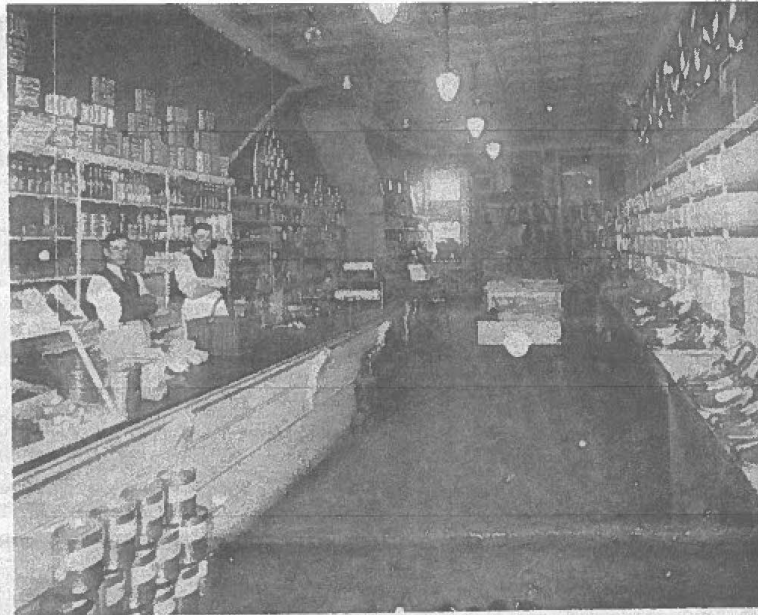
"After I moved my business I didn't stock any fancy shoes really, just the staples that people always needed. I'd spend a lot of time, I often stayed up till midnight going over samples to make sure I'd have shoes that would sell," he said.

Long-time customers who dropped by the old house last week to look over the remaining stock had tales of their own. In some of the busiest times of his career, O'Connor sold as many as 200 pairs of shoes in a single day.

He only recently moved into the Grove Park Home. That's why his family was helping to clear out the boxes of leftover stock last week, at bargain prices of \$1 to \$10 a pair for all-leather shoes.

"Dad never held sales, and when something didn't sell he just kept it around," said son Ken.

Some of the boxes were a little yellowed and many of the manufacturers aren't heard from these days, names like Smith's Scooters, Lucky Strike and Miss Charmer. Then again, some of those 40-year old shoes are beginning to look a little fashionable again.



Great communicator: Charlie O'Connor, at top in his Dunlop St. store (on the left), and below, in a recent photograph, will be remembered by many Barrie residents for his keen interest in all those who came into contact with him.

Everyone went to his place for shoes and a chat

By KATE HARRIES

ONE OF Barrie's best-loved characters died peacefully at the age of 85 on Tuesday at Grove Park Home.

Charlie O'Connor, who was affectionately known for his ability to "talk a mile a minute," probably sold shoes to every long-time city resident in over 50 years in the retail footwear business.

He operated The Ideal Shoe Store on Dunlop St. but later moved his business and sold shoes from an outbuilding at the rear of his Berczy St. home, finally retiring in 1983.

"He'd start talking the moment you'd go in," recalled Ald. Sam Cancilla, whose shoes came from O'Connor when he was young, and who subsequently bought shoes for his young family there.

He always remembered everything about a customer, from the size of his shoes, to how the school basketball team he was a member of was doing, Cancilla recalled. "You always came out of there a little happier than you went in."

Although the business was run out of O'Connor's home, it was very successful, offering good quality shoes, and running up sales that were higher than those of many stores, Cancilla said.

O'Connor was born, raised and lived all his life in the Barrie area. He is survived by his son Kenneth, daughter-in-law Janet and three grandchildren. He was predeceased by his wife Jean, six brothers and two sisters.