



Council Report For the Meeting of February 6, 2025

To: Council **Date:** January 31, 2025
From: Mayor Alto
Subject: Mayor's Report to Council

REPORT TO COUNCIL

BACKGROUND

Napier, New Zealand became Victoria's first Twin City in 1973. Located on the east coast of New Zealand, Napier is an apt and fitting twin city for Victoria, as we share many similar features and challenges. As an active port city, tourist destination, and regional hub, Napier experiences many of the same challenges and opportunities that we do with urban space planning, climate change, housing costs, community wellbeing, and more, giving our two cities much to share and learn. Napier also has an established and complex relationship with the Māori Nations on whose land the City sits. Reflecting this unique relationship with local Indigenous people, the city of Napier has an internal directorate- *Te Waka Rangapu*- dedicated to bridging the gap between Council and *mana whenua* (Māori authority and territorial rights) and *tangata whenua* (Māori people as a whole), and the city has oriented many of their practices to align with *te ao Māori* and *te reo Māori*- or the worldview, principles, practices, and language of the Māori. This directorate dedicates much time, effort, and resources to building meaningful relationships, truth, authenticity, and reconciliation.

The Treaty of Waitangi, signed in 1840, protects Māori rights while establishing a framework for a partnership between the colonial government and the Māori. New Zealand's history reflects repeated failures to honour many of the original treaty's frameworks, but the treaty has served as a guide for Māori/settler relations and is foundational to the formation of the state of New Zealand. The relationship between the local government and the Māori is guided by this national document.

Given this advanced and complex relationship, Canadian local governments, including our own, have much to learn from our twin city counterpart. Victoria had not made an official trip to Napier since 2013 and missed the opportunity to visit in 2023 to celebrate the 50th anniversary of our Twin City agreement. However, in 2024 Napier celebrated the 150th anniversary of the establishment of the Napier borough, and given the time that had passed since our last visit, we accepted their invitation to join that commemoration and re-establish the relationship with our oldest twin city.

This was also an opportunity to learn about international indigenous reconciliation and support the establishment of a nation-to-nation relationship between the Māori and the Songhees and

Xwsepsum Nations, as the stewards and owners of the land on which Napier and Victoria exist. As such, the invitation to join Napier Mayor Kirsten Wise was extended to the Songhees and Xwsepsum, supported by the City of Victoria.

TRIP

On November 24, the seven-person City delegation departed Victoria and landed in New Zealand on November 26. The program began on November 27 with a *pohiri*, or formal welcome on the land, which took place at *Whararengi Marae*. *Whararengi marae* is located in *Puketapu*, approximately 12 kilometres west of Napier. Its principal *hapū* are *Ngāi Tāwhao* and *Ngāti Hinepare* of *Ngāti Kahungunu iwi*. The *wharenuī* is called *Te Matehou*. The marae connects ancestrally to the waka *Takitimu*, and the Tūtaekurī River. Here, the iwi welcomed our delegation onto the land, introduced us to Māori language, protocols, customs, and games, and shared a traditional Māori *hāngī* lunch.

Our delegation spent time building relationships through conversation and sharing with the Maori iwi members and leadership, and the Napier Mayor and Council. Part way through the day, our settler delegation left the Lekwungen delegation to provide them the opportunity to connect organically and directly with the Māori. During this time, the settler delegation joined a Napier Councillor for a walking tour. Later the groups rejoined for a chance to experience a *waka*, or traditional Māori sailing boat, to learn about Māori practices and how the iwi have worked to pass traditional knowledge to younger generations through education, programming, and experiences.

The second day began early with a 7 AM public event to commemorate the 150th anniversary of Napier Borough. As guests, our delegation was recognized and welcomed, after which we joined the audience and listened to school choirs, heard from local dignitaries, and witnessed a *haka* performed by a local school. We then joined Mayor Wise, Council, senior staff, the Napier youth council, and local leaders for a breakfast and networking morning. From there, our delegation spent the day meeting with the Mayor, Council, and senior staff for presentations and dialogue about Napier urban planning, housing, infrastructure plans, and operations. Highlights included a discussion about urbanization and housing, community safety and social services, as well as a presentation about a future mixed-use community building. This day was concluded by an optional e-bike tour, and finally a formal dinner and official “150 Celebration wrap up” with the Napier council. At this time, gifts were exchanged between the delegations.

The final day of the trip brought our delegation to the new Napier waste water treatment plant. During the 2013 visit, Napier was in the beginning stages of designing and building the new plant while at the same time, the CRD was in the preliminary stages of planning the new treatment plant, and the 2013 delegation was able to bring information on the Napier plan to CRD staff, to help inform local treatment plant plans. Given this, it was particularly fascinating to assess how our facilities were similar and different. The delegation then toured *Ātea a Rangī*, which is a natural site of significant historical and cultural importance. With a large standing star compass, *Ātea a Rangī* is a where the art of *Whakātere waka* (traditional navigation) is passed on to other generations. This is done in a traditional learning environment to a select few who sail and crew *waka* throughout *Te Moana nui a Kiwa* (Pacific Ocean).

Following this tour, our delegation joined Napier staff for a traditional fish and chips lunch and final goodbyes, before departing for the airport. The delegation arrived home on Friday, November 27.

CONCLUSION

It would not be an unfair assessment to say that this protocol trip was invaluable for reestablishing the City's relationship with our first twin city. The integration and routine use of Māori song in Council activities, and the use of Māori language in the City of Napier's communications, service delivery, and programming is impactful and educational for their City Council, staff, the residents of Napier, visitors to the area, and to the iwi. It establishes a culture of reconciliation and respect for Māori knowledge, identity, and ways of being, while recognizing and protecting Māori culture and the relationship between the iwi and the City. The bonds, lessons learned, and connections built in the trip have already provided more opportunities for our cities to connect and learn from each other.

The impact of sharing this opportunity and our relationship with the Nations is profound. While this report will not speak to experiences that the representatives of the Songhees and Xwsepsum Nations, we have been told that witnessing the exchange of ideas, tradition, language, and identity was monumental. Being able to facilitate this, as a City, furthers our own path to reconciliation.

We hope to welcome a delegation from Napier in the future, and encourage residents to learn more about Napier, and New Zealand/Aotearoa.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mayor Alto', written in a cursive style.

Mayor Alto