



For the Committee of the Whole Meeting August 9 2018

Date: Tuesday August 7 2018

From: The City Family

Subject: City Family Story as told from the perspectives of the City Council Members that are part of the City Family: Continued Reconciliation and Removal of Sir John A. MacDonald Statue

Mayor Helps, Family Head

In 2017 the City of Victoria began a formal process of reconciliation with the Songhees and Esquimalt Nations on whose territories the City is founded. When the City first approached the Nations, it was in a very colonial way, asking them to sit on a “reconciliation task force.” Through conversation we learned that a more Indigenous-focused approach would be a better way to proceed if we were sincere in wanting to pursue truth and reconciliation. In response, we formed a City Family and began a Witness Reconciliation Program.

Council set this process in motion through approval of the Witness Reconciliation Program in June 2017 (see documents attached). As part of this process, decision making with regards to reconciliation (other than budgetary allocations) are made by the City Family with the Songhees and Esquimalt Chief and Councils as witnesses. Witnesses, in Lekwungen tradition, listen to the story of the family and give their input and guidance to find a good way forward.

Part of the conceptual framework endorsed by Council in June 2017 included the following language:

For the City to do more than talk about Reconciliation, we must be prepared to question convention, learn from Indigenous custom and tradition, and risk doing things differently than our usual routines and processes. Our comfortable reliance on terms of reference, timelines, workplans, benchmarks, checklists and other conventional assessments of success and progress will not add value or meaning to this work, move it forward, or demonstrate our readiness to face and embrace the challenges of Reconciliation.

This language in the June 2017 report outlined what might be considered a “decision-making process”:

After each Witness Ceremony is complete, and the advice of the Witnesses offered and heard, the City Family will facilitate the actions needed to realize the ideas endorsed by the Witnesses.

The City Family has been gathering since the summer of 2017. We gather once a month in my office at City Hall and share food and conversation. One time, recently, I suggested to the family that perhaps we could “come to you” and meet at the Esquimalt Nation or the Songhees Nation. Hereditary Chief Ed Thomas gently pointed out, “You don’t need to come to us. You are always already on our territory.” This is just one example of the many humbling and generous truth-tellings that has been shared during the process.

After a year of discussion, deliberation, truth-sharing, and seeking counsel from the Songhees and Esquimalt Chiefs and Councils on multiple occasions, the family decided on the first concrete action we would like to take as we continue the path of truth and reconciliation. We will remove the statue of Sir John A. MacDonald from the front doors of City Hall so that the family members and other Indigenous people do not need to walk past this painful reminder of colonial violence each time they enter the doors of their municipal government.

In addition to being the first Prime Minister of Canada, John A. MacDonald was a key architect of the Indian Residential School system. In 1879 he said, “When the school is on the reserve, the child lives with its parents, who are savages, and though he may learn to read and write, his habits and training mode of thought are Indian. He is simply a savage who can read and write. It has been strongly impressed upon myself, as head of the Department, that Indian children should be withdrawn as much as possible from the parental influence, and the only way to do that would be to put them in central training industrial schools where they will acquire the habits and modes of thought of white men.”

I am ashamed to say that I have an undergraduate degree in Canadian history, a master’s in Canadian history and a half-completed Ph.D. in Canadian history. It is not until we began this Witness Reconciliation Program that I learned about the role that Canada’s first Prime Minister played in developing residential schools, the effects of which are well known to be still felt today both by school attendees and their children and grandchildren.

The statue will be removed and stored in a city facility until an appropriate way to recontextualize MacDonald is determined. We do not propose to erase history but rather to take the time through the process of truth-telling and reconciliation as part of the Witness Reconciliation Program to tell this complex and painful chapter of Canadian history in a thoughtful way.

Members of the City Family have worked together to craft this language that will go on a plaque where the current statue stands. The witnesses – the Chiefs and Councils of the Songhees and Esquimalt Nations – have provided their input and approved the final wording:

“In 2017, the City of Victoria began a journey of Truth and Reconciliation with the Lekwungen peoples, the Songhees and Esquimalt Nations, on whose territories the city stands.

The members of the City Family – part of the City’s Witness Reconciliation Program – have determined that to show progress on the path of reconciliation the City should remove the statue of Sir John A. MacDonald from the front doors of City Hall, while the City, the Nations and the wider community grapple with MacDonald’s complex history as both the first Prime Minister of Canada and a leader of violence against Indigenous Peoples.

The statue is being stored safely in a city facility. We will keep the public informed as the Witness Reconciliation Program unfolds, and as we find a way to recontextualize MacDonald in an appropriate way. For more information please visit www.victoria.ca/reconciliation

The statue will be removed on Saturday August 11th and the plaque installed immediately. After an appropriate amount of time has passed (as determined by Elders from the Songhees and Esquimalt Nations) a cleansing, blessing and healing ceremony will be held in the space where the statue formerly stood. In the longer term, as determined by motion of Council in late 2016, a piece of art representative of Lekwungen culture will likely go in this space.

Marianne Alto, Family Member

When we began this journey, I said “As a corporation, we have not done this kind of work before, the work is new to us and so will be the way we do the work.” I did not know then how the work would change how I see and live in the world. Each Family Gathering has offered unexpected opportunities to grow, reconsider, re-examine, reimagine. The trust and candor risked by each Family member in our conversations and considerations has been a revelation, and has given me a new lens through which to view, and be in, our community of neighbours.

Moving the statue of John A. is a simple task, but it bares heavy hearts’ burden. While intellectually I understood the debate about its location and history, I did not understand the heart-borne trauma of it until, after a number of Family Gatherings, Indigenous members spoke to the effect of walking past it each time they entered into City Hall for our Gatherings, or any other daily, routine task. I acknowledge my obliviousness, and expose my own ‘aha’ moment upon hearing the tales of sorrow and hurt at each encounter with this symbol.

It is just a symbol – as it has stood for decades in unknowing approval of actions no one would accept now, its move will also be a symbol of movement towards a future in which Indigenous and non-Indigenous Victorians share a community growing into one of alliance, understanding, acceptance and collaboration.

In a meandering journey taking the time to evolve as it must, where the journey itself is about healing and learning, our final destination is less a place or outcome than it is hope. I treasure that hope, and am privileged to be part of this Family’s journey.

Charlayne Thornton-Joe, Family Member

It has been an honour to serve as part of the City’s Witness Reconciliation Program and I thank those who are part of this family who have helped me with each step of our way. I was often emotional learning more about residential schools, the 60’s scoop and other horrible events in Canada’s history.

It is one thing to know that these things happened, but it has opened my eyes and heart to hear personal stories from family members. There have been times where I have felt uncomfortable with the discussions, and my feelings were often at odds as I grappled with my pride of being Canadian and the recognition that my grandparents came to Canada hoping to give their children and grandchildren a better life and more opportunities, with the now better understanding that those who came also took those same opportunities away from our Indigenous populations. The

historical lessons I have learned has also brought me closer to my maternal grandmother, who I never met but I am told was a child of a Chinese labourer and an Interior Salish woman. This personal journey has been difficult to put into words.

This journey has also provided clarity in work needed to be done as a Council member. I now understand that we cannot have reconciliation without truth. As human beings sharing this land, there is much learning and healing to be done and as a Chinese philosopher once said, "A journey of a thousand miles must begin with a single step," I now recognize that the removal of Sir John A. MacDonald from the entrance of City Hall is the right decision for all groups that his policies negatively affected and who must pass him and be reminded when they come to City Hall a place that we say is open and welcoming to all.

Recommendation

That Council receive this story for information and endorse the decision of the City Family.

Respectfully Submitted,

Mayor Helps, Family Head
Councillor Alto, Family Member
Brianna Dick, Songhees Family Member
Carey Newman, Family Member
Janice Simcoe, Family Member
Ed Thomas, Esquimalt Hereditary Chief and Family Member
Councillor Thornton-Joe, Family Member