

Memo

For Information and Consideration of Council: Postulating an Indigenous Relations Function at the City of Victoria

What is an Indigenous Relations Function (IRF)?

An IRF is a facilitator, comprised of one or more talented individuals whose responsibility is to enable and nurture the emerging substantive relationship between the City and local Indigenous Nations, starting with Songhees and Esquimalt.

What Would an IRF Do?

A City of Victoria Indigenous Relations Function could facilitate and oversee the City's evolving relationship with local First Nations. At the outset, this work could focus on the Songhees and Esquimalt Nations, but over time could include Indigenous people residing in an urban context within the City, and eventually other nearby Nations as needed to build strong civic/Nation connections.

While respecting Indigenous custom and tradition, the IRF would be more than a protocol function, rather the IRF could be a significant, if not primary, resource for the City's staff and elected leaders in the implementation of the City's strategic priority of 'Reconciliation and Indigenous Relations'.

The IRF would be primarily responsible for ensuring a high focus on positive intergovernmental relationships between the City and its neighbour Indigenous Nations, in particular the Songhees and Esquimalt Nations, leading to well informed, high performing relationships, partnerships, and initiatives. The IRF could facilitate and provide advice and guidance to the city on any Indigenous-related event, initiative, partnership, or other endeavor. It would liaise with the Nations to build strong, long lasting mutually beneficial associations for multiple purposes. It could provide support and assistance for committees, working groups, departments and staff seeking guidance on Indigenous relations.

The IRF would identify and nurture the connections needed to ensure that the City learned and respected Indigenous protocols and customs as the City undertakes activities intended to create opportunities for Reconciliation and knowledge building, both within the corporation and in the community generally.

The IRF would facilitate the City's Witness Reconciliation program, providing strategic leadership and support for the City's internal (staff learning, program development, outreach initiatives, Elders in residence, Indigenous Artist in Residence, etc.) and external (Reconciliation dialogues,

place naming, economic development, cultural heritage preservation and animation, etc.) Reconciliation and Indigenous relationship building.

This function would collaborate with all City departments to build strong bonds with Indigenous Nations, community organizations, residents and other government partners to support Council direction and advance the City's strategic priorities and interests.

The IRF would bring to the City's Reconciliation Program strategic thinking, organizational learning of Indigenous values, customs, history, economic development, opportunity and partnerships, as a start. The IRF could evolve over time to act as the primary facilitator and resource for the City's current and future Indigenous relationships, with an emphasis on practical applications and tangible actions that will create a routine, substantive awareness and appreciation of Indigenous past, current and future culture, economy and existence as they relate to their homeland, on which the city now stands.

What Attributes Would be Needed by IRF Leadership?

The IRF would rely on leadership with individual(s) able to create an environment of collaboration, teamwork, innovation and commitment to Reconciliation in the context of the City's strategic commitment to Reconciliation, relationship and knowledge building. These leaders have a depth and breadth of experience with Indigenous Peoples, are able to address complex problems and unconventional situations in intricate and critical environments, understand the limitations of local government, but be willing to 'push the envelope' of those conventions, reflecting the direction and priorities of Council.

The IRF should include facilitator(s) with exceptional diplomacy, tact and communications skills, comfortable with all levels of Indigenous and non-Indigenous governments, communities, neighbourhoods and residents. This function would need strong leadership, with collaborative, team building and interpersonal skills, in conventional and non-traditional environments, a comfort with First Nations history, customs, values and ways of working, and an understanding of Indigenous-Crown relations and consultation obligations and the role local government plays in that relationship.

To be effective and provide value to the City, IRF leadership would need comprehensive knowledge of local Nations, an understanding of and an ability to demonstrate respect for Indigenous culture, traditions and protocols, the ability to build and establish relationships, excellent communication, interpersonal, basic research and analytical skills, the ability to use initiative, problem solve, use good judgment, plan and organize work, and be able to work with and contribute to a team.

Where Would an IRF Reside in the Corporate Structure?

Creating an effective IRF will demand that the City creates balance between Indigenous and non-Indigenous values, processes, expectations, structures, cultural awareness and safety. The City will need to be flexible, fluid and open to new ways of working.

In the standard non-Indigenous hierarchy of a corporate structure, the IRF could report to the city manager, to ensure it has, and is seen to have, a high priority position within the corporation at the senior staff level, ensuring its longevity beyond electoral terms. It could work with other municipal staff, and staff with other governments, to develop appropriate protocols, agreements and other instruments that advance First Nations and City relationships, strategies and initiatives.

Respectfully submitted,

Councillor Alto
(reviewed by Jocelyn Jenkyns)