

## Council Member Motion For the Committee of the Whole Meeting of June 10 2021

**To:** Committee of the Whole

Date: June 8 2021

From: Mayor Helps and Councillor Alto

Subject: Canada Day 2021

## LATE MOTION RATIONALE

This motion is late because information regarding some Lekwungen people's feeling and sentiments about Canada Day celebrations this year came to our attention late last Friday afternoon. The Songhees Nation held a ceremony at the legislature on Tuesday afternoon for all island nations in honour of the 215 children who died at the Kamloops Indian Residential school and to also collectively grieve their own children at Vancouver Island schools who didn't return home. The City Family – the City's reconciliation "advisory body" – participated at the formal invitation of the Songhees Nation, which gave us an opportunity to check in informally with City Family members about this year's Canada Day celebration given the information we'd received on Friday.

In short, this motion is late because we didn't have enough information before the motion deadline of 11:00am Monday to make a recommendation to Council. This motion is here today – and recommended to be forwarded to today's daytime council meeting – because it is time sensitive from a logistics and planning point of view if Council wishes to direct staff to change course on Canada Day at this time.

## BACKGROUND

Each year the City organizes a Canada Day celebration to bring the community together for a diverse, multicultural celebration of our country. Last year because of COVID-19, an online one-hour televised celebration replaced an in-person community gathering. This year, a similar event is being planned – a diverse, multicultural celebration of Canada in the form of a one-hour TV broadcast which features local musicians and artists.

Staff met recently with long-standing Lekwungen participants in the Canada Day celebrations in preparation for this year's event. Those participants said they would not take part in Canada Day celebrations this year in light of the 215 children's bodies at the Kamloops Indian Residential School discovered so close to July 1<sup>st</sup> and the pain and trauma this is causing.

We had been discussing with staff how to incorporate recognition of the 215 children into the event somehow but hadn't considered not holding a celebration this year.

Having the opportunity at the Songhees ceremony on Tuesday to gather with the City Family – the City's reconciliation "advisory body" – we asked the members of the family for their thoughts on how we proceed with respect to Canada Day. They advised that it would be difficult to proceed

with a regular celebration this year and that it would also feel odd to do nothing. They also noted that we have our first family gathering since last fall next Wednesday and that that might be a good time to discuss options. Some members also noted that we should take our direction and seek input from both the Songhees and Esquimalt Chiefs.

The more we reflect, the more we understand that holding the usual Canada Day celebrations could be damaging to the City's and the community's reconciliation efforts. The history of our country's genocidal relationship with First Nations has been once again revealed in a way that is painful for the Lekwungen people as well as First Nations across the country.

Given this, the respectful, relationship-building and reconciliation-oriented step to take is to rethink the City of Victoria's traditional Canada Day celebration for 2021 and to take one of the two courses of action laid out in the recommendations below, to be determined by staff in conversation with the Songhees and Esquimalt Chiefs, the City Family and the long-standing Lekwungen participants in the City's Canada Day celebrations.

## RECOMMENDATONS

1. That Council direct staff to put on hold plans for the conventional Canada Day celebration this year and request that staff either:

a.) Do nothing further with respect to July 1st events this year

or

b.) Work with the Songhees and Esquimalt Chiefs, the City family and the long-standing Lekwungen participants in the City's Canada Day celebrations to explore the use of the hour-long TV broadcast as an educational opportunity, potentially drawing on the footage of the Reconciliation Dialogues (including but not limited to the first dialogue where Lekwungen elders and others share the history and stories of these lands known today as the City of Victoria, the last dialogue where the Canadian College of Performing Arts students provide an educational piece on the history of residential schools and Sir John A Macdonald), and on any contributions the Songhees and Esquimalt Nations may wish to make including, but not limited to, words from the Chiefs, songs and dances by the Lekwungen Dancers, etc.

The determination as to which course of action to take a.) or b.) to be made by staff in conversation with members of the City Family, the Nations and the long-standing Lekwungen participants of Canada Day events.

2. That this motion be forwarded to the daytime Council meeting of June 10<sup>th</sup> for consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Mayor Helps

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Councillor Alto