

## **Attachment J: Truth and Reconciliation**

*In response to a Council member request for a summary of work done to date toward advancing the 2019-2022 Strategic Plan Objective #3 of Truth and Reconciliation during the First Period Triannual Accountability Report to Council in June 2021, staff are providing the following synopsis of how this work has been evolving.*

### **Our Journey Toward Truth and Reconciliation**

#### **The Past**

We share our respect for and deep gratitude to the lək'wəŋən speaking People on whose homelands the City of Victoria resides. To the Songhees and Esquimalt Nations, we thank you for having cared for these lands and waters since time immemorial.

Like many cities in Canada, Victoria has been shaped by colonialism, racism and other systemic oppressions. We acknowledge the legacy of colonialism and its role in creating and perpetuating systemic inequities for Indigenous Peoples. We strive to honour the Indigenous homelands on which we live and work, while understanding our own complicity in colonial systems.

We commit to challenging the colonial status quo by building meaningful relationships with and celebrating Indigenous communities, breaking bread together and supporting Indigenous healing through trauma-informed practices. Through this, we strive to embed Indigenous teachings in our relationships with each other and with the natural world.

We acknowledge that the unmarked graves discovered across British Columbia and Canada are a result of the residential school system and are aware that we do not yet know the full truth and the depth of traumatic experiences that continue to impact Indigenous Peoples.

#### **The Present**

While there is no single formal date when our journey began, in 2015 Council adopted a motion to consider the 'calls to action' in the Truth and Reconciliation final report, and consider how to move forward on the actions recommended by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that are within the City's jurisdiction to act. In 2016, exploration began considering a task force to guide the journey. After discussions with nearby Chiefs, and understanding the colonial imposition of such a model, with the Chiefs' wisdom and advice a Witness Reconciliation Program was initiated in 2017, to facilitate an Indigenous-informed journey.

The heart of this journey is a City Family, created to reflect Indigenous practice and teachings, which helps to determine how to move forward in this journey in collaboration with our First Nations partners. Through the City Family, we have heard Indigenous members recount stories of wisdom and experience, and speak to the benefits of periodic Witness Ceremonies to facilitate the offering and hearing of advice and direction, providing an opportunity to reflect on ideas, challenges, actions taken, and look forward to future actions.

Learning and understanding the past also continues through the Victoria Reconciliation Dialogues – what it is, why such understanding is needed, and why community conversations

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about reconciliation are essential to our journey. Under the guidance of Indigenous Knowledge Keepers (when health protocols allow) these will continue to evolve the path forward. We develop the roadmap of learning together.

We are committed to honouring and remembering the children who lost their lives at Canada's residential schools and honouring the residential school survivors and intergenerational survivors by supporting the annual Victoria Orange Shirt Day Ceremony and supporting other community events for learning going forward.

As individuals, and as an organization, we are all at different places of understanding past wrongdoings. It is our individual and collective responsibility to acknowledge, address, and repair harm that has been done because of past decisions and actions we have made or upheld. To nurture that individual learning, and ensure the message of commitment to Reconciliation is heard throughout the corporation, learning opportunities have been structured for staff and Council.

We started Indigenous Cultural Safety Training with Council and staff with 'targets in mind' about completion. Council and senior staff participated in a "Blanket Ceremony" placing individuals inside the personal stories of the colonization of Turtle Island. We learned, that for many, this training was eye opening, painful, and an emotional experience. For some, it brought out different lived experiences of oppression from power struggles related to race and ethnicity in home countries or here in Canada outside of the experiences of our Indigenous People – for others, it was realization of acknowledgment of ignorance of the power and privilege structures they hold personally and professionally. More time is needed to absorb the truth, to understand our history, and think about our role in the future.

We continue to shift the way we provide programs and services – from the re-naming of parks and streets, to ensuring Indigenous representation on our boards and committees, to the sharing of human and other resources, to seeking advice on what and how we need to move forward together.

The Indigenous Artist in Residence program was developed to celebrate Indigenous art and culture within City Hall and across the city. We hold ongoing community conversations on equity with Indigenous organizations and service providers on how to partner and establish policies that break down barriers.

We understand that these are small steps toward the vision for a shared future and not exhaustive of all the strides we are trying to take on a day-to-day basis. Reconciliation is itself a journey, not a destination, and as such its story cannot be told in a list of bullet points but requires an ongoing storytelling that nurtures our collective commitment to changing the way we understand our obligations to operate a city built without permission on territory not our own.

### **The Future**

Embracing the challenge of protecting and nurturing our Indigenous informed methods of learning and acting, the city is currently building on our existing relationships and structures to create an Indigenous Relations Function that will allow an evolutionary model of operation to work with a conventional corporation (the city) while embracing and including Indigenous values and protocols. Such a task will challenge fundamental assumptions and demand that we adapt

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how we work in ways yet unknown. This work continues into 2022 and beyond, and will be seen by future generations as evidence of our commitment to facing hard truths, embracing new realities and incorporating Indigenous values and vision into the heart of Victoria.

If we are committed to this journey, generations from now, we will have a collective vision and understanding of past harms, understand how to prevent their repetition, and truths will be known. There will be no divide among us on how we treat the land, our fellow stewards of the land and each other – regardless of race or identity. We are committed to this journey, no matter its length.

*This is a snapshot of our journey towards truth and reconciliation. As a small chapter of our story, we will continue to revise and evolve our understanding of our history, to work with our First Nations partners to chart a path ahead together.*