

REPORT

Department Name

To: Mayor Cote and Members of Council **Date:** October 18, 2021

From: Lisa Spitale
Chief Administrative Officer **File:** 05.1035.10

Item #: 2021-442

Subject: Indigenous Land Acknowledgement

RECOMMENDATION

THAT Council adopt the practice of using an Indigenous land acknowledgment as detailed in this report.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to seek Council’s endorsement of an Indigenous land acknowledgment to be made at formal City gatherings and to be printed on publically available City documents, agendas and web-based media.

SUMMARY

This report provides Council with an interim land acknowledgment for use at City gatherings and to be printed on publically available City documents, agendas and web-based media. An appendix to this report provides background information on the practice of land acknowledgments and guidelines for their use.

BACKGROUND

New Westminster has been settled on the unceded territories of multiple First Nations. Today the descendants of these Nations continue to live here as well as within the boundaries of more recently established municipalities neighbouring the City. In 2019, City Council initiated a process to grow relationships with these Nations; to better understand and respect their interests to these lands; and to seek ways to work together towards reconciling our past relationships. One aspiration of conversations with these Nations is to work together to identify an acknowledgement that is inclusive and respectful of all Nations’ interests to this place.

EXISTING POLICY AND PRACTICE

There is no existing policy for offering Indigenous land acknowledgements in the City. However, offering land acknowledgements at City gatherings has become a common practice in the past several years.

ANALYSIS

New Westminster is settled on the unceded and unsurrendered land of several Halkomelem speaking Nations. The City recognises that its knowledge of these Nations is limited and that their territories include areas far beyond the City's boundaries. Council is committed to improving the City's understanding of these Nations' interests through the development of respectful and reciprocal relationships. Part of this process aspires to identify an acknowledgement that is inclusive of their multiple interests to this land. However, this process is taking time and in the interim, the City should adopt a practice of acknowledging that First Nations continue to live here and have been present since time immemorial. This acknowledgement should recognise the impacts of colonial settlement on these lands and the unextinguished Rights these Nations have to them.

It is recommended that the following interim acknowledgement be adopted for use at formal City gatherings and to be printed on publically available City documents, agendas and web-based media:

We recognise and respect that New Westminster is on the unceded and unsurrendered land of the Halkomelem speaking peoples. We acknowledge that colonialism has made invisible their histories and connections to the land. As a City, we are learning and building relationships with the people whose lands we are on.

It should be reinforced that the above acknowledgement is an interim measure and is expected to evolve as the City builds relationships with local First Nations. In addition to the adoption of this land acknowledgement, Attachment 1 provides Council, staff and the community with background information on the practice of land acknowledgments and guidelines for their use.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications to the adoption of this land acknowledgment.

INTERDEPARTMENTAL LIAISON

The Reconciliation, Social Inclusion and Engagement Task Force contributed to the development of this land acknowledgment. This task force is comprised of Council representatives as well as staff from several City departments.

OPTIONS

There are two options for Council's consideration; they are:

1. Adopt the practice of using an Indigenous land acknowledgment as detailed in this report; or
2. Provide staff with alternative direction.

Staff recommend Option 1.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 – Guidelines and Background for Indigenous Territorial Acknowledgment

This report was prepared by:

Rob McCullough
Manager, Museums and Heritage Services

This report was approved by:

Lisa Spitale, Chief Administrative Officer



Attachment 1
Guidelines and Background for
Indigenous Territorial Acknowledgment

Guidelines and Background for Indigenous Territory Acknowledgment

Territorial acknowledgement to the lands occupied by the City of New Westminster

We recognise and respect that New Westminster is on the unceded and unsurrendered land of the Halkomelem speaking peoples. We acknowledge that colonialism has made invisible their histories and connections to the land. As a City, we are learning and building relationships with the people whose lands we are on.

What is a land acknowledgement?

When visiting the lands of another nation it is customary for Indigenous peoples to acknowledge the lands they are on. It demonstrates respect for that Nation and an awareness that the Nation has had a relationship with the land since time immemorial. An acknowledgment recognises the ties the descendants of those First People have to the land – its importance to their culture, ceremonies, and traditions (Indigenous Corporate Training).

By offering an acknowledgement, settler communities are recognising that the lands they are on were never ceded (handed over or yielded) to another state, government or people and that work is needed to reconcile this fact. For non-Indigenous people, taking a moment to acknowledge the Indigenous history of the land offers an opportunity for personal reflection and signals a commitment to reconciliation.

The City of New Westminster is involved in an ongoing process to improve relationships with local First Nations and understand their shared history and traditional uses of this land. As this journey progresses the City's acknowledgement may change through their guidance.

When should a land acknowledgement be made?

A land acknowledgement should be spoken at the beginning of all formal gatherings and meetings including:

- City Council meetings
- City Committee, Task Force and Board meetings
- New Westminster public events, workshops, gatherings, presentations, ceremonies and meetings

Who should offer the acknowledgement?

Generally, the senior person representing the City who is assigned to speak during a meeting, gathering or event should acknowledge the traditional territories. This would include the Mayor, Council member, Chairperson, MC, facilitator or staff person leading an event.

It is important to recognise that a land acknowledgement is different than a welcome to traditional territory. A welcome to traditional territory is something generally offered from a Chief/political representative/elder, or someone who is a descendent of the ancestral lands upon which the event is being held. This should be arranged in advance and based on mutual understanding between the event organizer and the host Nation. (Reconciliation Canada).

How can I make my acknowledgement meaningful?

The language of the above territorial acknowledgement has been chosen to be inclusive of those Nations with interests in this area. The language is a suggestion rather than a rule and does not need to be spoken verbatim. Prior to offering an acknowledgement be thoughtful and consider its context and the best manner to make it respectful.

Where should the acknowledgement be printed?

- Publically-available City strategies, plans, presentations and documents
- City Council, Committee, Task Force and Board agendas
- City website

What is colonialism?

Colonialism is the act of one group (nation) of people occupying and taking control of the land, people and resources of another. In the case of British Columbia, the intention of European settlers was not to simply exploit the land and its resources for the benefit Britain. The intention was to permanently settle and control the land through the displacement or assimilation of the Indigenous nations that had lived here since time immemorial. This form of colonialism is often called settler-colonialism. As these lands have never been ceded and remain occupied by settlers, this act of colonialism remains on them today.

What are unceded lands?

In 1763, King George III issued a [proclamation](#) stating that Aboriginal title existed and continued to exist on North American lands lying approximately west of the Appalachian Mountains and outside the limits of territories granted to the Hudson's Bay Company. This proclamation included the lands containing what is today known as British Columbia. Consequently, these lands continue to be Aboriginal until ceded (handed over or yielded) to the Crown through treaty or purchase. The 1763 proclamation is still valid in Canada and is honoured through Section 25 of the Canadian Constitution. To be clear, the lands now occupied by New Westminster were never ceded through treaty, nor have they been purchased by the Crown from local First Nations.

What does Halkomelem mean?

The area now known as New Westminster is located on unceded and unsurrendered lands of the Halkomelem speaking peoples. Halkomelem is a common language spoken by the many First Nations that have been resident to this land since time out of mind; it is comprised of three dialects (Halqeméylem or upriver, hə́ŋqəmińə́m or downriver, and Hulqumíńurń or island). The interests of many First Nations speaking these dialects overlap in the area that was settled on, and is now occupied by the City of New Westminster. The use of the term Halkomelem is inclusive, respecting the ties and asserted rights each of these Nations have to this land.

Why are no specific Nations named in this acknowledgement?

New Westminster has been settled on the shared territories of several Nations. The City recognises that its knowledge of these Nations is limited and is committed to improving on this through the development of respectful and reciprocal relationships with each of them. By naming only one Nation (or group of Nations), the City may show disrespect to Nations it has yet to engage with.

Understanding the shared history and traditional uses of this land has been part of the City's journey to reconcile its relationships with First Nations and Indigenous Peoples. The below resources could act as a

start to help others understand which Nations hold interests in the New Westminster area. However, it should be noted that these resources are not exhaustive and everyone's path to reconciliation is a personal journey of active self-education and humility.

- <https://maps.fpcc.ca/>
- <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/environment/natural-resource-stewardship/consulting-with-first-nations/first-nations-negotiations/first-nations-a-z-listing>
- <https://native-land.ca/>

References

Indigenous Corporate Training. *Guide Book to Indigenous Protocol*. Port Coquitlam, 2019. Ebook. 25 08 2021. <<https://www.ictinc.ca/hubfs/ebooks/eBooks%202020/Indigenous%20Protocol.pdf>>.

Reconciliation Canada. *Cultural Teachings: Welcome to Territory & Land Acknowledgments*. Vancouver, 4 February 2019. Web page. <<https://reconciliationcanada.ca/cultural-teachings-welcome-to-territory-land-acknowledgments/>>.