

## Indigenous Relations Update

Presented To:	City Council
Meeting Date:	June 28, 2022
Type:	Correspondence for Information Only
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Recommended by:	Chief Administrative Officer

## Report Summary

This report provides an update on the City's initiatives related to Indigenous Relations and provides a response to Council's request for appropriate language that could be used for a land acknowledgement in the municipal context in Greater Sudbury.

## Relationship to the Strategic Plan, Health Impact Assessment and Community Energy & Emissions Plan (CEEP)

This report responds to the strategic objective to Create a Healthy Community and the associated goal to Strengthen Indigenous Relations Towards Reconciliation, as identified in the CGS Strategic Plan 2019-2027.

## Financial Implications

There are no direct financial implications associated with this information report.

## Background

As previously reported to Council and, as identified in the City of Greater Sudbury Strategic Plan 2019-2027, the CGS continues to strengthen Indigenous relations towards reconciliation. Led by the Strategic Initiatives, Communications and Citizen Services Division, and supported by a steering committee composed of members of the Corporation's Executive Leadership Team as well as the Office of the Mayor, staff have continued to engage with our Host First Nations as well as Indigenous-led organizations and Urban Indigenous citizens.

The focus of staff efforts remains largely on the four priorities identified in earlier updates: Community Network; Dedicated Resources; Education; and Workforce. In addition, staff have worked on Council's request for guidance on appropriate language and approach to land acknowledgements within the corporation. Updates on each of these areas follow.

**Community Network** – Staff have recognized the importance of strong, trusted relationships as the basis for

all future progress in Indigenous Relations. Outreach to our community's Host First Nations, Atikameksheng Anishnawbek, Wahnapiatae First Nation and Sagamok Anishnawbek, continue to advance at both the staff and governance levels. Mayor Bigger leads dialogue with the respective Gimaa in each community, CGS staff are able to follow up with colleagues in each administration to further discussions and partnerships.

Indigenous-led organizations are critical partners for the CGS across our community and staff continue to work with multiple agencies and individuals in a mutual interest approach to issues and opportunities. In addition to the work with members of the Indigenous Sacred Circle, leadership of N'Swakamok Native Friendship Centre and Better Beginnings, Better Futures have been extremely generous in their support of the municipality's outreach efforts.

Areas such as Emergency Planning, Community Safety and Wellbeing, and Economic Development, have seen considerable partnerships and success in recent years. Response to the Pandemic, planning for potential evacuations and the recent BEV Conference are good examples of the shared work that is just beginning. Staff are also linking with Indigenous engagement units within other agencies, such as GSPS and PHSD to broaden our networks and support each other's initiatives.

**Dedicated Resources** – Throughout 2020 and 2021, the focus of the organization shifted and significant staff capacity was dedicated to pandemic response. While formal steps towards the creation of a permanent Indigenous liaison position were delayed, as outlined above, the partnerships developed as the community worked together to address COVID-19 and all of the associated impacts have strengthened the networks for the better.

Feedback from our Indigenous network partners also assisted staff in understanding the need to build an internal support system around any new position of this nature, before posting and filling the job. With support from our community networks, staff continue to refine the role and requirements for a new position and expect to have recruitment begin in July or August.

As internal capacity increased in 2022, and to address the need for a more comprehensive approach to Indigenous Relations, staff augmented the resources assigned to the area by creating an Indigenous Relations Team and an associated Steering Committee. The Team formalizes the role of the Executive Director of Strategic Initiatives, Communications and Citizen Services as the Executive Lead, but also creates the new, interim position of Project Director, Indigenous Relations. Michael Loken is assisting in this new role and is dedicated to advancing initiatives in all four of our focus areas. Sherri Moroso also works on this team, providing significant context and network contacts. The Indigenous Relations Steering Committee, consisting of Ed Archer, Kathryn O'Leary, Steve Jacques and Joanne Kelly provides timely guidance and support to the staff team.

**Education** – Appropriate cultural awareness training for CGS employees remains a top priority for this area. Staff are building on the success of the training pilot project and are committed to finding ways to create and deliver this education on a local level. This approach has been very successful in other municipalities but does take some time to develop the capacity required in our regional community.

**Workforce** – As reported to Council, the CGS is committed to developing a professional and effective workforce that reflects the demographic make up of our city. These goals are being advanced through the Diversity and Inclusion pillar within the Human Capital Management Plan (HCMP), a corporate-wide initiative that is now well underway. The Indigenous Relations Team is supporting the HCMP development and providing advice specific to the needs of the local community.

**Land Acknowledgement** – In September of last year, Council requested that staff work with Indigenous community partners to develop a land acknowledgement statement that could be used for Council meetings. This request became a topic of discussion at many meetings within the community and was also raised by the Mayor at some of his meetings with leaders of First Nations. The strong consensus advice received from our partners is that while there could be a place for well-crafted and consistent land acknowledgements within written documents or agreements, spoken acknowledgements should be flexible and come from the heart of the person speaking.

The purpose of a land acknowledgement is to make a personal statement about your connection to the land and your understanding and beliefs relating to Indigenous communities; to simply read a prepared text could become perfunctory and lose its meaning and value. There is consensus, of course, that most statements should contain the basic information that the City of Greater Sudbury lies primarily within the traditional territory of the Atikameksheng Anishnawbek and that portions of the municipality are within and adjacent to the traditional lands of other first nations, particularly the Wahnapiatae First Nation and Sagamok Anishnawbek. It is also appropriate to recognize the role that Metis and Inuit peoples have on our community now and in the past.

Upon this base, City of Greater Sudbury representatives and staff should feel comfortable, if they choose, to add personal context to the recognition. This could include appreciation for the land guardianship role that Indigenous peoples have undertaken in the past, or a connection to the land by the speaker. Staff have worked with Mayor Bigger on this approach and he will begin to introduce its use at the beginning of Council meetings and other events. Staff will produce a brief note for the use of other CGS representatives and staff in the future. Two links to additional resources have been included below and could be useful reading to provide additional context.

## **Resources Cited**

Indigenous Relations Update Report to Council, November 12, 2019 – <https://pub-greatersudbury.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?documentid=1727>

Article from Sudbury.com, June 6, 2022 – <https://www.sudbury.com/local-news/land-acknowledgements-must-honour-the-connection-to-the-land-5448730>

University of Saskatchewan Teaching Module “Finding Your Personal Land Acknowledgement” – [https://teaching.usask.ca/curriculum/indigenous\\_voices/land-acknowledgements/module.php](https://teaching.usask.ca/curriculum/indigenous_voices/land-acknowledgements/module.php)