

Report To:	Regional Chair and Members of Regional Council
From:	Jane MacCaskill, Chief Administrative Officer
Date:	June 16, 2021
Report No:	CA-07-21
Re:	Indigenous Relationship Initiative Update

## RECOMMENDATION

1. THAT as Halton Region moves forward in building and fostering reciprocal relationships with Indigenous Peoples based on cultural understanding, empathy and respect, Council endorses the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report and Calls to Action, and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.
2. THAT the Indigenous Land Acknowledgement and its uses outlined in report CA-07-21, as well as permanently flying the flag of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation be endorsed to demonstrate the Region's commitment to Indigenous recognition and commemoration.
3. THAT Council approve staff working in partnership with Indigenous Peoples and local First Nations to establish a Halton Indigenous Advisory Group, modelled after the Halton COVID-19 Indigenous Elder Advisory Group, to work together and support areas of mutual interest.
4. THAT a copy of Report No. CA-07-21: Indigenous Relationship Initiative Update be sent to the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation, Six Nations of the Grand River, Credit River Métis Council, Grand River Métis Council and Tungasuvvingat Inuit, for their information.

## REPORT

### **Executive Summary**

- The Truth and Reconciliation Commission final report and Calls to Action as well as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) report have helped increase public consciousness about the need for all Canadians to learn

more about Indigenous history and the traumatic impact of the Residential School System, colonization and Indigenous rights, as well as highlighted the importance of building and fostering relationships with Indigenous Peoples.

- As Halton Region moves forward in recognizing the importance of building and fostering reciprocal relationships with Indigenous Peoples based on cultural understanding, empathy and respect, it is recommended that Council endorse the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report and Calls to Action, and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.
- While there are no specific First Nation communities located within the boundaries of Halton Region, the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation were the original owners of the territory in which Halton Region sits and have Treaty lands in Halton.
- As part of Halton Region's responsibility to move forward with Truth and Reconciliation, the Region has begun building relationships with Indigenous Communities and Leadership.
- An Indigenous Relationship Building Initiative has been developed to set an overall direction to advance actions for Reconciliation and Indigenous Relationship building.
- A COVID-19 Elder Advisory Group was established to provide expertise and guidance to help inform the Region's vaccine planning for Indigenous Peoples living in Halton Region.
- Staff recommend permanently flying the flag of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation and Council endorsing the use of a land acknowledgment statement to demonstrate the Region's commitment to Indigenous recognition and commemoration.
- As the Region moves forward with the Indigenous Relationship Building Initiative and associated work plan, priority areas include training and building Indigenous cultural competency opportunities for staff and Regional Council commemorating and raising awareness of significant Indigenous dates and providing various means of Indigenous forms of recognition and honouring.

## **Background**

### Truth and Reconciliation Commission and United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was established on June 1, 2008 with the purpose of documenting the history and lasting impacts of the Residential School System on Indigenous students and their families. It provided Residential School Survivors an opportunity to share their experiences during public and private meetings

held across the country. In June 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission released a summary of its findings along with 94 "calls to action" regarding Reconciliation between Canadians and Indigenous Peoples. The Calls to Action are directed to all levels of government, organizations, as well as individuals to make concrete changes in society.

On September 13, 2007, the United Nations adopted the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), which acknowledges both individual and collective rights of Indigenous Peoples around the world, principles of equality, partnership, good faith and mutual respect. The Declaration is a legally non-binding resolution with major themes focused on the rights of Indigenous Peoples:

- To self-determination
- To protect their culture through practices, languages, education, media and religion
- To their own type of governance and economic development
- To health
- The protection of sub-groups (elderly, women, and children); and
- Land rights

In 2016, Canada signed the UNDRIP. In December 2020, Bill C-15, *The United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* was introduced into the House of Commons, to further bring Canadian laws into alignment with the resolution.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission report and 94 Calls to Action, and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples have:

- helped increase public consciousness about the need for all Canadians to learn more about the Indigenous narrative, history and the traumatic impact and legacy of the Residential School System, colonization and Indigenous rights.
- highlighted the importance of building and fostering reciprocal relationships with Indigenous Peoples based on cultural understanding, empathy and respect.

There are eight Calls to Action that are addressed to various levels of government, and five that refer to municipal governments specifically. These can be found in Attachment 1 for your reference. As Halton Region moves forward in the journey to learn more about the Indigenous narrative, history and rights while recognizing the importance of building and fostering reciprocal relationships with Indigenous Peoples based on cultural understanding, empathy and respect, it is recommended that Council endorse the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report and Calls to Action, and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

### Definitions

Aboriginal is a collective noun and term that is no longer used among many Indigenous People within Canada. In earlier documents you will find that Aboriginal refers to First

Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples; the first inhabitants of Canada. This term came into usage in Canada when *Constitution Act, 1982*, enacted as Schedule B to the *Canada Act 1982*, 1982 c.11 (UK).defined the term.

Indigenous is a collective noun and term used internationally; nationally it is used to encompass First Nation, Métis, Inuit, Non-Status and Urban Indigenous communities. It is also the term currently used by the Provincial and Federal Governments. In United Nations documentation, for example, “Indigenous” is used to refer broadly to peoples of long settlement and connection to specific lands who have been adversely affected by incursions by industrial economies, displacement, and settlement of their traditional territories by others. Indigenous is the term used in this document.

First Nation is used to describe Indigenous Peoples, Status and Non-Status and can refer to an individual Nation legally identified as a Band within Canada; A reserve-based community, or a larger grouping and the Status Indians (i.e. under the federal Indian Act) who live in them.

Métis refers to Indigenous Peoples who are of Indigenous and European. There are nine Métis Regions across Ontario. These Regions are not the same as Treaty territories, as the Métis People of Canada did not sign Treaties with the Federal Government.

Inuit refers to specific groups of people generally living in the far north of what is now Canada, but have representation across Canada.

Reconciliation refers to establishing and maintaining a mutually respectful relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples in Canada. For this to happen, there has to be awareness of the past, acknowledgement of the harm that has been inflicted, atonement for the causes, and action to change behaviour.

These definitions are intended to provide a consistent understanding and context for this report.

### The Halton Indigenous Context

There are no specific First Nation communities located within the boundaries of Halton, however, there are Indigenous Communities around Halton which include: The Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation, Six Nations of the Grand River, Haudenosaunee Confederacy Chiefs Council (Not elected), Métis Nation of Ontario, Credit River Métis Council and the Grand River Métis Council. In addition to that, there are a number of Indigenous People living in Halton, however, most recent 2016 census data is not a true representation of the actual population, given that Indigenous People are sometimes reluctant to provide personal information and participate in Census, as these collections of information are not supported by some communities. This sense of mistrust is in direct relation to historical experiences.

The Mississaugas of The Credit First Nation are the original Treaty and title holders of the territory in which Halton Region resides. Maps of the Treaty lands in Attachment 2 to this report for your reference.

## **Discussion**

### Work Conducted to Date

As part of Halton Region's responsibility to move forward with Truth and Reconciliation, the Region has begun building relationships with Indigenous Communities and Leadership. In order to effectively and respectfully accomplish this, Halton has engaged an Indigenous Advisor, to assist in establishing and building these relationships while also developing an Indigenous Relations Initiative for the organization.

Halton's Indigenous Advisor has worked and advocated for many Indigenous communities locally, provincially and nationally for the past 25 years. He has traveled throughout North America as a noted Indigenous artist, teacher, musician, educator, facilitator, trainer, writer, consultant and speaker. He has presented to numerous First Nations, Indigenous communities, local district school boards, colleges, universities, corporate institutions as well as several Indigenous and non-Indigenous non-profit organizations.

His experience and emphasis on the importance of engaging Indigenous People in a respectful and reciprocal way and the much needed alliance of Indigenous and non-Indigenous People in the community is a critical step forward in Halton's path of Reconciliation and in building an inclusive culture.

This year, Halton has also hired its first Indigenous relations summer student and staff are in the process of hiring an Indigenous relations intern.

### Indigenous Relationship Building Initiative

Led by Halton's Indigenous Advisor and supported by the Strategic Policy & Government Relations division of the CAO's office, an Indigenous Relationship Building Initiative has been developed to set the overall direction to advance action for Reconciliation and Indigenous Relationship building.

The Initiative focuses on enhancing cultural competency and knowledge including Indigenous narrative, history and heritage as well as education on Indigenous groups and organizations around the Region. The initiative also emphasizes the importance of building and fostering relationships with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Communities around Halton and Urban Indigenous leaders in the community.

Moving forward, in addition to building relationships, the initiative includes a comprehensive work plan which identifies additional area of work including:

- supporting departmental staff in their Indigenous engagement initiatives and outreach;
- providing guidance, expertise, tools and resources to staff on Indigenous competency, relationship building and engagement initiatives;
- developing and delivering various training opportunities for staff and Council;
- building awareness and cultural competency within the organization; and
- the identification and implementation of recognition and commemoration opportunities throughout Regional buildings and properties, including flags, art, symbols and plaques.

### COVID Indigenous Elder Advisory Committee

As Halton continues to develop relationships with Indigenous Communities and People in Halton as well respond to the ongoing COVID-19 Pandemic, in accordance with the direction from the Halton Region COVID-19 Vaccine Committee, the COVID-19 Indigenous Elder Advisory Group was established. This group has come together to inform vaccine planning for Indigenous Peoples living in Halton Region. Members of the COVID-19 Indigenous Elder Advisory Group provide valuable feedback, input, and advice on COVID-19 vaccine clinic models and approaches, identify other health and COVID-19-related issues important to Indigenous Peoples living in Halton, as well as provide roadmaps to address these issues.

The membership of the COVID-19 Indigenous Elder Advisory Group includes representatives and attendees from the following Indigenous Communities and Organizations:

- Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation
- Six Nations of the Grand River
- Credit River Métis Council
- Grand River Métis Council
- Tungasuvvingat Inuit
- Native Men's Residence, Toronto
- Other Local Indigenous Leaders

Individuals from Six Nations of the Grand River were also invited to participate but were not able to join at this time. This group is chaired by Halton's Indigenous Advisor and supported by staff from Strategic Policy & Government Relations as well as Business Planning & Corporate Initiatives.

To date the COVID-19 Indigenous Elder Advisory Group has identified ways to ensure Halton's COVID-19 vaccination clinics are welcoming, inclusive and support Indigenous People in Halton. This includes providing input into clinic signage, support resources, the need for transportation options and they participated in opening of one the clinics with a traditional Indigenous ceremony and blessing. Evaluations of clinic experience has been

sent out to those who have been vaccinated at Halton's clinics. Responses will be evaluated with the COVID-19 Indigenous Elder Advisory Group to determine ways to further enhance the clinic experience. Halton Region would like to thank the advisory group for their continued support and participation to help respond to the pandemic.

This advisory group model has proved to be informative and beneficial to the vaccine roll out to Indigenous People in Halton. By developing relationships and consulting those with first hand lived experience, and whom are directly impacted, has proven to be invaluable. Staff are recommending that the work of the Indigenous Elder Advisory Group continue as this model could be used to provide expertise, and guidance as Halton moves forward with the development and implementation of the Indigenous relations initiative as well as provide input into other regional projects and programs. Staff will continue to work with the Indigenous Advisory Group, to develop a terms of reference, with a focus on areas of mutual interest, and will report back to Council about their work on a regular basis.

### Recognition and Commemoration

As a symbol of Halton's commitment to Truth and Reconciliation, and inclusivity, as part of the initiative and work plan, various means of Indigenous recognition and commemoration will be developed and implemented.

According to Halton Region's Flag Protocol Policy, Halton Region will display the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation Flag on the courtesy flagpole at Halton Regional Centre in recognition of National Indigenous Peoples Day on June 21, as part of National Indigenous History Month. This has been agreed to by the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. To demonstrate Halton's further commitment to recognition and commemoration of Indigenous People and history in Halton, staff are recommending to permanently fly the flag of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. This is consistent with other municipalities, including the Town of Oakville, and will be accommodated in the modernization of the Halton Regional building, with an additional flagpole.

In addition, as part of the modernization project of the Halton Regional Centre, staff will work to source Indigenous artwork, commemorative plaques, signage and symbols to create a welcoming and inclusive environment in Regional facilities for Indigenous People.

Another way to demonstrate a commitment to recognition is through the development and use of a land acknowledgement statement, which recognizes the traditional territory of the Indigenous People who called the land home before the arrival of settlers, and in many cases still do call it home. Land acknowledgments are used by various levels of government and organizations. Within Halton, the City of Burlington and Town of Oakville use a land acknowledgment statement, and the Town of Halton Hills is in the process of developing one. It is critical that land acknowledgments are developed in consultation with Indigenous Communities, particularly those whom has treaty lands. Halton staff has worked with the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation to develop a land

acknowledgement for Halton Region's use, that is respectful, meaningful and inclusive, and it is as follows:

*Boozhoo, She:kon , Tanshi, Greetings!*

*Halton Region acknowledges the Treaty Lands of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation as well as the Traditional Territory of the Haudenosaunee and Huron-Wendat on which we gather.*

*In stewardship with Mother Earth and the enduring Indigenous presence connected to these lands we acknowledge the Indigenous Nations of the past, present and future.*

*In the spirit of ally-ship and mutual respect, we will take the path of Truth and Reconciliation to create change, awareness and equity as we strive to elevate the collective consciousness of society.*

*Miigwetch, Nia:wen, Marsi*

It is recommended that the land acknowledgement be used for (in person and virtual) Council meetings, formal gatherings and meetings with dignitaries, ceremonies, large staff meetings, internal meetings where indigenous matters are discussed, and other meetings as determined by departments. In addition, it is recommended that the land acknowledgment be posted on Halton.ca and through the modernization of the Regional building, that a plaque on the grounds with it be installed. Staff recommend that Council endorse the land acknowledgment and its use.

### Next Steps

The month of June is celebrated as National Indigenous History Month with June 21 recognized as National Indigenous Peoples Day. Staff are developing an internal awareness campaign to inform and educate staff on the importance of recognizing this month and encouraging them to learn more about Indigenous history and culture. Information about the month will also be communicated to the community through the Regions communication channels.

As work continues to move forward on the Indigenous Relationship Initiative and work plan, staff will also work to develop and deliver opportunities for training and education for Regional Council on Indigenous history and culture moving forward.

## FINANCIAL/PROGRAM IMPLICATIONS

All costs associated with the Indigenous Relationship program are included in the 2021 Operating Budget.

Respectfully submitted,



Lynne Simons  
Director, Strategic Policy & Government  
Relations

Approved by



Jane MacCaskill  
Chief Administrative Officer

If you have any questions on the content of this report,  
please contact:

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Attachments: Attachment 1: Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action  
Attachment 2: MCFN Maps