

REPORT

Office of the Chief Administrative Officer

To: Mayor Johnstone and Members of Council
Date: February 13, 2023

From: Lisa Spitale
Chief Administrative Officer
File:

Item #: 2023-63

Subject: A Year of Truth

RECOMMENDATION

THAT Council direct staff to prepare a Proclamation naming March 2023 to March 2024 “A Year of Truth” and to bring a presentation to launch this initiative at a future regular Council meeting.

PURPOSE

This report outlines a staff initiative called A Year of Truth.

SUMMARY

A Year of Truth is an initiative that will connect both City staff and the community to the City of New Westminster’s Truth and Reconciliation journey by establishing that truth needs to come before reconciliation. Several opportunities to learn and reflect will be offered. This report summarizes some of the planned activities and provides context for future actions to come, as well as provides the background of the genesis of this initiative.

BACKGROUND

New Westminster’s reconciliation efforts are motivated by a responsibility to recognize and to honour the deep original connections to this area by Halkomelem speaking Nations, some of whom lived here along the banks of the Fraser River, and others who passed through by land or water to travel between territories. New Westminster is also the birth place of colonization in British Columbia, as it was the colonial capital. The City

acknowledges that its very existence was built upon the destruction of the land and river connections of the original inhabitants, and of their lives and livelihoods. Therefore, it is the City's responsibility to correct the wrongs of our colonial history. To that end, New Westminster's relationships with the First Nations of this land and with the urban Indigenous community is an ongoing strategic priority for the City.

The City of New Westminster's commitment to engagement with the First Nations is two-fold: regulated engagement in the form of consultation; and relationship-based engagement with the goal of partnership and collaboration.

The City fulfills its legal obligation to consult with local First Nations on City developments and activities by connecting as early as possible in the planning phases, and conducting ongoing audits of internal processes to ensure consultation practices are efficient, effective, and mutually beneficial.

Forging supportive and effective partnerships with the First Nations is a lifelong process enabled through building trust, respectful engagement, and active listening.

Overview of Regulated Engagement Actions:

Since 2018, the City of New Westminster began to openly engage with multiple Nations around projects within our regulatory control. These largely center on consultation around OCP bylaw amendments. Nations are identified through both the Provincial Consultative Areas Database and Port of Vancouver consultation list. Additionally, at this time the City began communicating with First Nations to seek their active involvement in the development of City strategies and plans that may eventually require senior government funding or permitting. The City is legally responsible to consult with local First Nations on City developments and activities as early in the planning phases as possible. The City continues to audit internal processes for the purposes of developing consultation practices that are efficient, effective, and mutually beneficial.

Examples of regulated engagements include: various amendments; advising developers of requirement to consult; seeking First Nation participation in Reforestation, Flood Mitigation and Hume Park Master Planning, Biodiversity, and Community Energy and Emissions Plan strategies.

Overview of Relationship-Based Engagement Actions:

Since 2018, the City has been overtly expressing intent to reach out to neighbouring Nations to better understand their connections to the New Westminster area; this was a measured approach to understanding the intersecting interests of all Nations by requesting to meet with them at a leadership level in the hopes of strengthening relationships.

Examples of relationship-based engagements include: motion approval to include First Nation representation on civic committees; meeting requests sent to 10 identified

Nations; Council to Council meetings and Mayor to Chief meetings with several First Nations; and signed Sister Community agreement with the Tsilhqot'in.

Overview of Staff-Based Education and Learning:

The City's Truth and Reconciliation work does not end in external relations. Truth and Reconciliation Call to Action # 57 states:

“Professional Development and Training for Public Servants: We call upon federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal governments to provide education to public servants on the history of Aboriginal peoples, including the history and legacy of residential schools, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Treaties and Aboriginal rights, Indigenous law, and Aboriginal–Crown relations. This will require skills-based training in intercultural competency, conflict resolution, human rights, and anti-racism.”

- Training and learning has begun for City staff in several ways that acknowledge learning takes many forms. For example, all staff of the New Westminster Public Library have completed the 12 week “Indigenous Canada” online curriculum through the University of Alberta.
- Medicine Wheel Workshops are offered to staff on a monthly basis.
- Advice for projects – the Indigenous Relations Advisor can provide advice on protocol for various projects
- Elder-in-residence program with William Nelson and Soup and Bannock – this program started casually, and has expanded. William Nelson, a residential school survivor and urban Indigenous man from Nisga'a and Gitksan families, hosts soup and bannock weekly at lunch with staff and guests.
- Little Indige-Library - this lending library of books for staff includes fiction, non-fiction, as well as books for children and youth. Staff are welcome to sign out a book.
- Staff continue to learn from and collaborate with organizations such as, Spirit of the Children Society and Buffalo Heart Healing Medicine Society in a variety of ways, such as National Indigenous Peoples Day; National Day for Truth and Reconciliation; the offering of learning opportunities for staff, such as drum-making workshops.
- Monthly meetings of *SQUÁPSTUL YA:YS* [ska-paw-stul yah-yis]: (Gathering to work) or the *Reconciliation Working Group* (RWG) where an open invitation is extended to a cross-section of departments to share in the experience of Participatory Action Research. The RWG plans and carries out the *Truth Before Reconciliation Strategy*. They are currently on Phase Three of the strategy, which is a public and private sector review to identify leading practices and approaches with focus in the areas of employment, engagement and representation on

boards, committees and advisory committees but includes all operational areas. Phase four will take a holistic approach to conduct a City inventory in order to identify and address systemic barriers within the City. This phase will use an equity lens to complete a full, corporate wide review of policies, procedures, programs, practices and resources.

DISCUSSION

Building on the groundwork of education and relationship-building, a next step is needed to more deeply understand what Truth and Reconciliation means. These two terms must be separated in order to truly learn and understand what they mean. For this reason, staff are recommending that 2023 be acknowledged as “A Year of Truth”, with several actions that educate and acknowledge the truth of the harms of colonization and the Indian Residential School system. It is important to note that this is *A Year of Truth*, not *The Year of Truth*; it may take several years to develop a deep enough understanding of the truth before reconciliatory acts can be undertaken.

Bringing forward the concept of A Year of Truth was inspired by work done by the previous Council and the release of the *Summary Report on Actions Taken by the City of New Westminster Involving Indigenous Peoples* in October of 2022. The work to uncover the dark history of New Westminster’s violent past and its genocidal relationship with local Indigenous communities was an important and necessary first step in acknowledging, understanding and accepting the truth. *Truth* must come before *Reconciliation* because it is only through the seeking of truth that we will truly understand those things for which we need to reconcile.

Actions in Support of A Year of Truth:

While some actions have been determined already, some will be implemented as the need arises. Council will continue to receive updates as the work unfolds. There is an emphasis on interdepartmental collaboration and opportunities for learning in inclusive ways. Some of the planned actions include:

- Continued professional development, with some targeted for divisions or departments with unique needs such as Police, Fire, etc.
- Continued voluntary collection of demographic data from participants on Be Heard New West, to understand what voices are missing / underrepresented in the City’s public engagement processes, including community members who identify as Indigenous.
- Economic Development Actions:
 - Business Association Launch Program for Indigenous-Owned businesses. The Business Association launch program allows for grants of up to \$5,000 for a group to develop or revitalize a business association in three targeted areas - Queensborough, West End, and Sapperton - as well as

two city-wide groups: Home-Based businesses, and Indigenous-Owned businesses. Staff in Economic Development have begun the task of promoting this opportunity and work is expected to take place over the course of 2023.

- E-Apply improvements to self-declare Indigeneity for data collection purposes. This, along with other voluntarily opt-in data, will provide a more robust picture of the types of business owners in New Westminster, and support the development of targeted programs.
- Opportunities for community participation through a variety of initiatives also exist. Some examples are:
 - The *Truth before Reconciliation Contest*, which will take place in June during Indigenous History Month and leading up to National Indigenous Peoples Day.
 - Public Art opportunities: Exploratory conversations with Public Art staff are underway to develop opportunities for the community to be involved, and more information will be shared as details are finalized.
- Heritage Services Actions:
 - Completing a repatriation policy this year to address Indigenous collections held by the museum.
 - Working with Spirit of the Children Society and Buffalo Heart Medicine Healing Society to offer community programs aimed at improving respect and understanding of Indigenous ways of being.
 - Extending the exhibition “Reconciling” that addresses truths attached to acts of reconciliation. Artist Luke Parnell explores a feeling of disenchantment through his piece Neon Reconciliation Explosion; the downed statue of Judge Begbie addresses the imposition of foreign laws on a land; and the 215 shoes placed at New Westminster’s cenotaph reflects our community’s response to the Residential School legacy in Canada.
 - Facilitating the planning and delivery of both National Indigenous Peoples Day and Truth and Reconciliation Day events for the residents of New Westminster. Each event is aimed at improving awareness of the diversity of indigenous experience and culture in the city.
 - Supporting engagement with local nations around the outcomes of the Report on Actions Taken by the City of New Westminster Involving Indigenous Peoples.
- New Westminster Public Library:
 - Undertaking an historical review and report of any actions, procedural, operational or otherwise that may have served to silence, erase or cause

harm to Indigenous persons or communities throughout the library's history.

- Continuing to build relationships with local Indigenous groups and organizations such as Spirit of the Children, Buffalo Heart Medicine Healing Society, and the BC Metis Federation in the provision of programs and cultural awareness activities throughout the city.
- Continuing to prioritize collection and access to materials (books, media) created by, for and about Indigenous lives, perspectives and ways of knowing.
- Facilitating presentations and promoting awareness of Indigenous authors and knowledge keepers through delivery of author talks, and other cultural presentations and events, for all ages.
- Supporting local National Indigenous Peoples Day, Truth & Reconciliation Day, and Orange Shirt Day through collaboration with organizing Committee members.
- Initiating work to 'decolonize' the library's approach to collection management and access through a reworking of subject-headings and classification schema.
- Developing an Indigenous Storyteller in Residence program to produce new works and highlight those of local Indigenous story tellers.
- Developing a formal Library Strategy of Truth, Decolonization, and Reconciliation for approval by the Library Board of Trustees

NEXT STEPS

Indigenous Relations staff will continue to work interdepartmentally to plan and implement actions in support of A Year of Truth. Future communications to Council will provide details as they are finalized.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

All proposed programs so far are achievable within existing operational budgets.

INTERDEPARTMENTAL LIAISON

Indigenous Relations and Economic Development collaborated to prepare this report. Several of the programs will involve all departments and opportunities exist to collaborate with community partners.

OPTIONS

There are two options presented for Council's consideration:

1. THAT Council direct staff to prepare a Proclamation naming March 2023 to March 2024 "A Year of Truth" and to bring a presentation to launch this initiative at a future regular Council meeting.
2. THAT Council provide staff with alternative direction.

Staff recommends Option 1.

APPROVALS

This report was prepared by:

Jen Arbo, Economic Development Coordinator
Christina Coolidge, Indigenous Relations Advisor

This report was reviewed by:

Robert McCullough, Manager, Museum & Heritage Services
Jennifer Miller, Manager, Public Engagement
Chris Koth, Manager, Programs & Community Development, New Westminster Public Library
Blair Fryer, Senior Manager, Communications & Economic Development

This report was approved by:

Lisa Spitale, Chief Administrative Officer