



Staff Report for Council Meeting

Date of Meeting: June 23, 2021

Report Number: SRCM.21.07

Department: Office of the City Manager
Division: Strategy and Government Relations

Subject: SRCM.21.07 – Indigenous Land
Acknowledgement Statement

Purpose:

The purpose of this report is to review how land acknowledgement statements are created and used, their purpose, and to seek Council approval to create a Richmond Hill Land Acknowledgement Statement as part of the City's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion initiative.

Recommendation(s):

- a) That staff be directed to research and consult with Indigenous communities to develop a Richmond Hill Land Acknowledgement Statement.

Contact Person:

Lise Conde, Manager of Strategy and Government Relations

Manpreet Abrol, Coordinator, Strategy and Government Relations

Report Approval:

Submitted by: Lise Conde, Manager, Strategy and Government Relations

Approved by: Mary-Anne Dempster, City Manager

All reports are electronically reviewed and/or approved by the Division Director, Treasurer (as required), City Solicitor (as required), Commissioner, and City Manager. Details of the reports approval are attached.

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Background:

Staff have commenced work on a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion initiative, as directed by Council in their 2020-2022 Council Strategic Priorities under the priority of “A Strong Sense of Belonging.” One of the early emerging themes of research and benchmarking has been the value of using an Indigenous land acknowledgement to recognize the traditional lands on which municipalities exist.

In March 2019, Council considered a motion to establish a land acknowledgement for use at Council meetings. At that time, Council declined to do so, but directed staff to create a course available for employees “to provide education and training on the history of Aboriginal peoples, including the history and legacy of residential schools [...] so that we may provide a better level of service to the indigenous members of our community.” This course, entitled The Path – Your Journey through Indigenous Canada has been in place since August 2019.

There is a building and ongoing national discourse on the history of Indigenous peoples in Canada, the horrors revealed during the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the recent discovery of the remains of 215 Indigenous children at the site of a former residential school in Kamloops. Additionally, June is Canada’s Indigenous History Month. As a result, this report is being brought forward at this time should Council wish to approve the use of a land acknowledgement for Richmond Hill.

Indigenous Land Acknowledgments

The acknowledgement of traditional territory demonstrates recognition and respect for Indigenous peoples and supports education on the history of the lands on which we live and work. This acknowledgement appropriately takes place at the beginning of meetings, conferences, and presentations.

A land acknowledgement statement typically references specific peoples (such as the Anishinabek, the Haudenosaunee and the Huron-Wendat), treaty areas, and/or neighbouring communities. This is sometimes followed by a statement of thanks, goodwill and/or intentions for reconciliation.

A key part of stating a land acknowledgement at the beginning of a meeting is for participants to reflect on its meaning, what happened in the past and what changes can be made going forward in order to further the reconciliation process. Land acknowledgements mark a small but important part of the process of reconciliation and building a positive relationship between the settler community (non-indigenous people) and Indigenous peoples.

Best Practices and Benchmarking

Land acknowledgements are, by their nature, unique to every place. However, research to date provides some context for Council’s consideration of the recommendation in this report.

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The Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) provides guidance on traditional land acknowledgement statements. Key principles of their advice include the need to research the history of the land within and near a municipality, including treaties and Indigenous histories. They note that Indigenous communities may no longer be located on their traditional lands, so engagement beyond the municipality's borders is necessary. AMO recommends engagement of Indigenous communities and stakeholders and suggests providing municipal elected representatives and staff with cultural awareness training before implementing the use of a statement (as stated earlier, the City currently offers this).

Staff have canvassed other York Region municipalities and determined that Markham, Vaughan, Newmarket, Stouffville, Georgina and York Region itself use land acknowledgements at the beginning of Council meetings. King and Aurora do not. East Gwillimbury advised that they do not currently use a land acknowledgement, but they are in the process of developing one.

City staff have benchmarked other municipalities beyond York Region as part of our work on the Diversity Equity and Inclusion initiative. Others that use land acknowledgements include: Toronto, Hamilton, Ottawa, London, Guelph, Ajax and Oshawa.

Financial/Staffing/Other Implications:

There are no financial implications to the recommendations in this staff report.

Relationship to Council's Strategic Priorities 2020-2022:

Consideration of establishing an Indigenous land acknowledgement for Richmond Hill is part of the development of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion initiative, as directed by Council's Strategic Priority of "A Strong Sense of Belonging."

Conclusion:

As a result of the increasing national discourse on Indigenous-settler relations, this staff report invites Council to consider having a land acknowledgement statement for Richmond Hill by directing staff to research and develop one in consultation with Indigenous Peoples, in accordance with established best practices.

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Report Approval Details

Document Title:	SRCM.21.07 - Land Acknowledgement Statement.docx
Attachments:	
Final Approval Date:	Jun 14, 2021

This report and all of its attachments were approved and signed as outlined below:

Task assigned to MaryAnne Dempster was completed by delegate Darlene Joslin

Darlene Joslin on behalf of MaryAnne Dempster - Jun 14, 2021 - 5:03 PM