

Staff Report



To	Committee of the Whole
Service Area	Office of the Chief Administrative Officer
Date	Wednesday, September 6, 2023
Subject	Refreshed Territorial Acknowledgment

Recommendation

1. That the refreshed Territorial Acknowledgement for the City of Guelph, included in the report titled Refreshed Territorial Acknowledgement, dated September 6 2023, be approved.
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Executive Summary

Purpose of Report

To present a refreshed and updated territorial acknowledgement for the City of Guelph which accurately and adequately recognizes First Nations presence on the land we now refer to as Guelph and acts as a first step towards Reconciliation.

Key Findings

The original territorial acknowledgement was developed in 2016 and was intended to act as a living document that would evolve over time. More recently, both formal Indigenous partners and Indigenous community members had identified historical inaccuracies by omission in the City of Guelph's current territorial acknowledgement and have expressed the desire for greater commitment to reconciliation be included in the acknowledgement.

Undertaking the engagement process to update the territorial acknowledgement required intentional and purposeful listening and re-learning. Through this process, it was recognized that the City needed to clearly understand the value and importance of language and commitments to reconciliation which needed to be reflected in the territorial acknowledgement.

The desire for a more comprehensive commitment to learning and reconciliation has resulted in an approach where the formal territorial acknowledgement may be followed by personal reflection and connection from the speaker. This two-part approach is further detailed below.

Strategic Plan Alignment

This initiative supports the Building our Future priority area of the strategic plan as we continue to build equitable, strong, vibrant, safe and healthy communities that foster resilience in the people who live here.

Building relationships based on respect and recognition with Indigenous partners and residents is necessary for an equitable and inclusive city. Acknowledging

Indigenous history, the impacts of colonialism and continued connections to land and traditions nurtures strong, vibrant, safe and healthy communities.

Financial Implications

None. These activities were undertaken using existing budget.

Report

The territorial acknowledgement is a [traditional custom](#) among First Nations to both recognize their host and their ceremonies, traditions and connections to the land. In addition, [the Government of Canada](#) recommends having a territorial acknowledgment:

- to honor the land and Indigenous presence that goes back a millennia
- to recognize the impact and consequences of colonialism
- to remind us of the legitimacy of Indigenous governance
- as a gesture that nurtures healthy and just relationships

The City of Guelph first adopted its current territorial acknowledgement in 2016. This first acknowledgement was developed with the support of local Indigenous community members and the Missisaugas of the Credit First Nation (MCFN). It was created with the intention of being a living document that would grow and evolve over time as the organization advanced its learning journey towards gaining more knowledge and insight. More recently, both formal Indigenous partners and Indigenous community members identified historical inaccuracies by omission in the City of Guelph's current territorial acknowledgement and have expressed the desire for greater commitment to reconciliation.

[The Truth and Reconciliation Commission \(TRC\) Calls to Action](#), released in 2015, calls for reconciliation through building relationships based on respect and recognition. This focus on reconciliation was further strengthened following the release of the final report and calls to action of the [Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls](#) report in 2019, and the uncovering of mass graves at residential schools across the country starting in 2021. These events helped to shape the City's focus on prioritizing actions that can advance reconciliation.

Understanding these priorities, revising and updating the territorial acknowledgment was the logical and important first step on the path to reconciliation. This process provides an opportunity to continue to learn and understand the rich and diverse history of the place now called Guelph and the people who have called and continue to call this place home.

In 2022, the City began its journey to refresh and update the territorial acknowledgment by initiating the engagement process and reaching out to formal Indigenous partners, local Indigenous community members and staff at the University of Guelph.

This initial engagement included participation and input from:

- Missisaugas of the Credit First Nation (MCFN)
- Six Nations of the Grand River Elected Council (SNGREC)
- Sharing Circle with local Indigenous community members
- Akinomaagaye Gaamik: Lodge of Learning
- Dr. Cara Wehkamp, Assistant Vice-President Indigenous Initiatives, University of Guelph

Engagement methods included both virtual and in person discussions, a sharing circle as well as email communications. This engagement provided valuable feedback that shaped the approach to this work.

The feedback received included recommendations that the territorial acknowledgement should:

- go beyond the oversimplification of stating treaty numbers or names
- address and correct historical inaccuracies
- include personal reflection and connection to the land
- address a greater understanding of and actions towards reconciliation

Important to the process and finalization of the territorial acknowledgement, engagement with both MCFN and SNGREC was conducted. This process helped to refine and adjust the language. Through this engagement process, MCFN has reflected positively on their involvement and offered a statement of support for this refreshed version of the territorial acknowledgement noting that the “development of the LA [land acknowledgment] was a collaborative effort and that it was a positive experience for all involved. ...the LA [land acknowledgment] was developed in a spirit of peace, respect and friendship.”

Through the engagement process, inputs included better representing and acknowledging the traditional uses of the land. Efforts were also made to balance the recognition of Indigenous Nations who have considered these lands as traditional territories. While the City has made efforts to acknowledge both MCFN and SNGREC, it is difficult for one body of work to include a comprehensive reflection of such complex histories. While the updated territorial acknowledgement has improved its recognition of SNGRECs traditional uses of the land and the City’s geographic proximity to the Haldimand Tract, the City has identified that future updates to how SNGREC is reflected may be necessary as treaty relationships are clarified by the Province. With the advancements the City has made and the ongoing conversations, it is clear that we have a strong foundation and will continue to listen, learn and evolve.

Those who were engaged spoke with clarity that to move forward and in the true spirit of reconciliation, it was imperative that the City’s commitments and individual understanding be reflected in the territorial acknowledgement.

With this understanding a two-part approach has been adopted for the City’s territorial acknowledgement. The first part will be a formal acknowledgment to be used in all formal and official settings, including council and committee meetings, large gatherings and in master plans and strategic governing documents authored by the City of Guelph. The second part will be more reflective and personal and can be used at the discretion of the speaker in less formal settings and when no formal decisions are being made.

Part 1 – Formal Territorial Acknowledgement (core statement)

The core statement is meant to address the formal part of a territorial acknowledgment and is a standardized statement that is to be read exactly as written. This statement recognizes our privilege and responsibilities and makes a commitment to act with intent. It identifies and recognizes the [First Nations](#) both past and present of this region, and identifies appropriate [treaties](#) and geographic placement of the City of Guelph. This core statement will be used at the beginning

of formal meetings, announcements, large gatherings and within master plans and strategic governing documents authored by the City of Guelph.

The revised territorial acknowledgement is as follows:

As we gather, let us take time to reflect on our privilege to live and work in Guelph; a city built over rich Indigenous histories. We are guests here, and we should reflect upon the responsibility to care for this land, the people who live here today, and the generations to come. If our actions today can move us towards reconciliation, we should take pause and make those decisions with intention and gratitude.

This place we call Guelph has served as traditional lands and a place of refuge for many peoples over time, but more specifically the AttiWonderonk, and the Haudenosaunee. This land is held as the treaty lands and territory with the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. Guelph lies directly adjacent to the Haldimand Tract and is part of a long-established traditional hunting ground for the Six Nations of the Grand River. Many First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples who have come from across Turtle Island call Guelph home today.

Pronunciation guide:

[Attiwonderonk](#) (At-ti-wan-da·ronk)

[Haudenosaunee](#) (Ho-den-no-show-nee)

Part 2 – Personal Reflection and Connection

While the core statement addresses the formalities of a territorial acknowledgment, the second part will focus on the individual delivering the acknowledgement. It will not focus on treaties or First Nations' history but instead focus on personal reflection, personal connection to the land and actions towards Reconciliation. This section provides an opportunity to reflect on each individual's personal privilege, background, and relationship to Guelph. To support the organization in moving towards this more personal reflection, additional resources will be provided to inform individuals on best practices and protocols. Additionally, learning sessions and training modules will be developed to support this aspect of the organizations learning journey. The first of these will be a [KAIROS Blanket Exercise \(Council Workshop September 20 2023\)](#), described as a unique participatory history lesson, will help lay the foundation for further understanding of reconciliation.

The personal reflection and connection portion (part 2) of the territorial acknowledgement is not recommended to be used in formal decision-making environments, but instead can be used at the comfort of the speaker in more informal and personal settings such as during working group or community meeting.

Moving forward, the development of an Indigenous Relations Framework (IRF) will further highlight a path for Guelph to advance reconciliation and enhance our relationship with Indigenous Nations and peoples. The IRF will also support the organization in developing the second portion of the territorial acknowledgment through a focus on truth and learning. Increasing our understanding and connection to the land will support the development of a more meaningful acknowledgement and commitment to continual learning and understanding of reconciliation.

Financial Implications

None. These activities were undertaken using existing budget.

Consultations

Throughout the development of Guelph's territorial acknowledgement, engagement was conducted via in person meetings (where possible), virtual meetings and email communications. Input and support were received from the following groups and departments.

- Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation (MCFN)
- Six Nations of the Grand River Elected Council (SNGREC)
- Sharing Circle with local Indigenous community
- Akinomaagaye Gaamik: Lodge of Learning
- Dr. Cara Wehkamp, Assistant Vice-President Indigenous Initiatives, University of Guelph
- Policy and Intergovernmental Relations
- Culture and Recreation, Guelph Museums
- Strategic Communications and Community Engagement

Attachments

Attachment-1 Refreshed Territorial Acknowledgment Presentation

Departmental Approval

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