

Taanshi kiyawaaw (hello everyone in Michif)

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment. I am "Red River Métis" or Michif and a citizen of the Manitoba Métis Federation and also the Métis Nation of Ontario.

In Guelph in 2010, we first raised the Métis flag at Guelph City Hall on Louis Riel Day, supported by the Grand River Métis Council. Different mayors, Councillors, and city staff have participated in similar events in the intervening 14 years. In January 2013, we organized a 500+ person Idle No More rally in front of City Hall as part of a nationwide awakening of Indigenous peoples. In 2021, hundreds of people marched in downtown after the discovery of unmarked graves of missing children at residential schools.

Much has changed. The sacred fire is in place. In 2016, the city joined in the celebration of National Aboriginal Day, as it was known at the time. The museum, library, art gallery, university, and school boards have done good work in aid of truth and reconciliation.

Now, the Indigenous Relations Framework is before you. The framework is a significant step toward on-the-ground action. City staff and their consultants have done an admirable job given the challenges. They deserve thanks for their work. You are aware of some of the difficulties staff have had getting to this point.

The framework is a good document that will lead the way to more concrete action, which is what we all want and are impatient for.

Having said that, it is important to note that Guelph has not kept up with the pace of change in the country. Many municipalities have taken more substantive action. Guelph has lagged behind. AMO and FCM have offered advice on what to do. Guelph needs to catch up.

The framework talks about working with the MCFN, SNGR, GRMC, and the "urban indigenous community". There is no single Indigenous community. And just like all communities, there are divisions and disagreements. Guelph lacks the Indigenous organizations and agencies that many other communities have. The Southwest Ontario Aboriginal Health Access Centre (SOAHAC) is the main service delivery body and the Waterloo-Wellington unit operates out of Cambridge, occasionally holding events in Guelph. Little mention is made of SOAHAC in the framework.

All parts of the framework are important, but I would like to draw your attention to three items.

Under Our Shared Understandings, one reads:

Impact-driven: Our actions work toward tangible improvements to Indigenous peoples' social, physical, cultural, and economic well-being.

Tangibly improving the lives of individual Indigenous persons is the goal. Symbolic gestures can build momentum and change perceptions, but the impact on lives should always be the focus.

Hiring and retaining staff dedicated to this initiative is key. Setting up an advisory circle is also a very important action, and is linked to building community capacity currently lacking. Getting the right representation will be challenging and requires care, as will establishing process.

1.1 Embed responsibility for urban Indigenous relationship building and community participation into dedicated roles within the City.

1.2 Establish a staff-led Indigenous Advisory Circle to offer advice and support for Indigenous relations, provide cultural guidance, and increase awareness.

In Learning Together, there is an action related to learning the truth. Truth is needed for reconciliation to occur. There remain huge gaps in understanding. Members of Council and all city staff should all gain cultural competency. Many governments have done this. There are many easy, available educational options to do this.

2.1 Develop and implement an education and training plan to build knowledge and awareness among City Council, staff, and the public about Indigenous worldviews, histories, cultures, and legacies, including colonization. This includes learning and practicing cultural competency to deepen understanding and collaboration.

This is an important milestone, let's get on with the shared work of truth and reconciliation.

Kishchi maarsii (Thank you in Michif)

Paul Smith