

Staff Report



To	Committee of the Whole
Service Area	Office of the Chief Administrative Officer
Date	Wednesday, September 4, 2024
Subject	Indigenous Relations Framework

Recommendation

1. That the Indigenous Relations Framework for the City of Guelph, as attached to the report titled Indigenous Relations Framework, dated September 4 2024, be approved.
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Executive Summary

Purpose of Report

To present the Indigenous Relations Framework (IRF) for the City of Guelph which provides guidance to the City in advancing reconciliation. The IRF reflects what was heard throughout the engagement process and will guide the City's efforts towards reconciliation. The IRF also outlines how the various City commitments will also address international and national priorities for improving the lives of Indigenous peoples.

Key Findings

The City of Guelph is committed to reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. Reconciliation is an important and necessary step towards healing past injustices, repairing relationships, and creating a more just and inclusive community. The City of Guelph has developed the IRF to guide this important journey. This framework aims to not only advance reconciliation but also improve the lives of Indigenous peoples living and working in Guelph while strengthening the City's connections with the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation (MCFN), Six Nations of the Grand River (SNGR), and the Grand River Métis Council (GRMC).

The project team initiated a three-phase engagement process with the MCFN, SNGR, GRMC, urban Indigenous peoples and organizations, and other partner organizations. The inputs gathered as a result of the engagement process are what was used to build the five areas of focus and 16 different commitments. Additionally, Attachment-1 Indigenous Relations Framework shows the alignments to the relevant Truth and Reconciliation (TRC) Calls to Action, Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) Calls to Justice, and United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) Articles. This is an important aspect to show how the City is not only advancing priorities heard through the engagement process, but also those identified by national and international reports and studies.

Strategic Plan Alignment

The framework and its commitments are aligned with the City of Guelph's Future Guelph: Strategic Plan 2024–2027. The development of this framework is a vital part of the strategic plan given it is an identified initiative for advancing reconciliation within the Advocate for Our City objective.

Future Guelph Theme

Foundations

Future Guelph Objectives

Foundations: Advocate for our city

Financial Implications

The integration of the commitments into existing projects and workplans is a key consideration of this framework and allows for the enhancement and strengthening of existing work, while integrating new attributes. Where commitments require resources not previously planned, staff will continue to explore ways to balance these needs with respect to available resources and ensure that any new requests for support are carefully considered alongside other priorities, including using a phased approach and interim solutions.

Report

The City of Guelph is committed to reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. Reconciliation is an important and necessary step towards healing past injustices, repairing relationships, and creating a more just and inclusive community. It is about fostering unity, respect, and shared prosperity for everyone. The City of Guelph has developed the IRF to guide this important journey. This framework aims to not only advance reconciliation but also improve the lives of Indigenous peoples living and working in Guelph while strengthening the City's connections with the MCFN, SNGR, and the GRMC.

Guided by the recent approval of the City's new strategic plan, the Strategic Initiatives and Intergovernmental Services team initiated the development of the IRF in partnership with Guelph Museums and Strategic Communications and Community Engagement. The work is being undertaken with the guidance and leadership from INDsight Consulting, an Indigenous-led consultancy. The result of this work is a framework focused on providing guidance to the City on how it can better learn, understand, prioritize and adopt commitments that will advance reconciliation. This more structured approach will help to improve relationships between the City and Indigenous Peoples and provide positive outcomes for Indigenous community members connected to and living within the City of Guelph.

The overall objectives of the IRF include:

- Provide guidance, structure and recommendations for the City to advance truth and reconciliation across the organization through the development of a framework
- Allow internal departments an opportunity to reflect on and action the identified commitments

- Review and commit to addressing Calls to Action, Calls to Justice and recommendations from federal and provincial studies and reports that are relevant within the municipal context
- Strengthen a mutually respectful relationship between the City and Indigenous Nations and Peoples through engagements.

Engagement Process

The project team initiated a three-phase engagement process with the MCFN, SNGR, GRMC, urban Indigenous peoples and organizations, and other partner organizations. The process began with a welcoming event in February 2024, designed to facilitate interaction between the Indigenous community and the City of Guelph team, fostering an environment conducive to inquiries and exchanges. This initial gathering informed the approach for subsequent discussions, establishing individual interviews as the preferred mode of engagement. The engagement progressed with meetings with MCFN and SNGR representatives, individual discussions with urban Indigenous peoples and organizations in Guelph, and other partner organizations. The findings from these discussions highlighted key areas of focus for developing the IRF and suggested actions and commitments for consideration. In the second phase of engagement, the city hosted an in-person group session at City Hall with the Indigenous community to review these findings and validate what was heard and if there were priorities missing.

In the third phase, after organizing all findings by areas of focus and relevant commitments, discussions were held with MCFN, SNGR and GRMC to validate the IRF. Additionally, a one-day session occurred for urban Indigenous peoples and organizations and other partner organizations to drop in, review, and provide feedback on the IRF areas of focus and relevant commitments.

What was heard

Overall, the City of Guelph, MCFN, SNGR, GRMC, and urban Indigenous peoples in Guelph agree that this marks the beginning of reconciliation with an acknowledgment of collective work ahead. For the City, it begins with acknowledging the truth. Knowing the truth necessitates investing in education about Indigenous history and its legacy in the present day, learning and practicing cultural sensitivity, recognizing existing barriers, eliminating racism and discrimination, and learning to walk alongside each other.

The MCFN and SNGR discussed the Nation-to-Nation relationship and the importance of upholding treaty rights. They emphasized the need to establish mutually beneficial and authentic relationships with a foundational understanding of history, culture, and heritage. Through Memoranda of Understanding, the parties can outline principles and guidelines for collaboration on Indigenous events and initiatives, economic reconciliation, environmental sustainability, and joint meetings on topics such as the progress of the IRF. They highlighted the necessity of Indigenous leadership in the City and the importance of regular and timely communications.

Indigenous people living or working in Guelph often feel invisible and want to be heard and included. They called for working together to identify a safe place to gather, grow food and medicines, and heal. They emphasized the need for

Indigenous leadership and Indigenous-led services within the City, noting that they often have to travel outside Guelph for such services and frequently lack transportation. They suggested integrating these services through a regional partnership with existing providers. Work is also needed to dismantle barriers and eliminate discrimination throughout the City. Additionally, steps must be taken to improve housing and transportation. While some of these priorities fall outside the City's jurisdiction, there are opportunities for the City to support efforts and to advocate for key changes. Opportunities will be evaluated as the IRF moves into implementation to find the right balance of influence. Several practical and incremental steps were offered to begin this journey, with a call for regular updates to ensure visible progress.

Indigenous Relations Framework

Using the robust engagement sessions from the past seven months as the foundation, the IRF has identified five areas of focus, and a total of 16 commitments to inform the City's Indigenous relations work over the coming 5 years (2025-2029). The framework and its commitments are aligned with the City of Guelph's Future Guelph: Strategic Plan 2024–2027. The development of this framework was a vital part of the strategic plan given it was identified as an initiative within the Advocate for Our City objective.

The key components that make up the structure of the framework and which are outlined in Attachment-1 Indigenous Relations Framework, include:

- Vision
- Mission
- Shared understandings
- Areas of focus (5)
- Commitments (16)

The vision and mission statements provide a long-term aspirational goal for the future of Indigenous relations in the City of Guelph including how the City will navigate achieving the desired future state. The shared understandings are a series of principles that serve as a guide for future decision-making. They help to create consistency in actions and will contribute to the overall wellbeing of First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples in Guelph.

The five areas of focus help to group the commitments that share a common theme which include:

1. Indigenous representation and participation
2. Learning together
3. Safe spaces and supports
4. Employment and economic reconciliation
5. Protecting our environment for future generations

The associated 16 commitments split across the areas of focus are intended to provide guidance to the City and outline the type of work required to improve and strengthen outcomes for Indigenous peoples. The framework was intentionally

developed with commitments as opposed to actions in order to have flexibility in the approach for how the City addresses each commitment. This allows for continuous evaluation of progress and ongoing assessments on the evolving needs of Indigenous communities to ensure the actions undertaken achieve the desired outcomes. Additionally, Attachment-1 Indigenous Relations Framework shows the alignments to the relevant TRC Calls to Action, MMIWG Calls to Justice, and UNDRIP Articles. This is an important aspect to show how the City is not only advancing priorities heard through the engagement, but also those identified by national and international reports and studies.

From the outset of this project, it was acknowledged that the work to advance reconciliation identified in this framework should not be the responsibility of one person or department, but in fact, should be integrated throughout the City and embedded in the work and efforts already being undertaken. This way not only will the framework guide future actions but will also enhance what is already happening across the organization. Structuring aspects of the framework within existing work emphasizes the point that reconciliation is a City-wide effort and must be integrated into existing work as opposed to separate more isolated actions. The framework provides the opportunity to enhance City-led efforts to address what was heard through engagement and to work towards the longer-term vision. The framework also provides the opportunity to organize the City's efforts under the areas of focus which will enable improved public reporting of City-led efforts to show the collective impacts of the work underway and its contribution to achieving the IRF vision.

Following the IRF approval at City Council, the City will continue to collaborate with Indigenous Nations and community members to begin to action the commitments and develop detailed implementation plans within available resources and capacity. The framework should be considered a living document that will continue to evolve and accommodate changes in the desired actions from the City.

Financial Implications

The integration of the commitments into existing projects and workplans is a key consideration of this framework and allows for the enhancement and strengthening of existing work, while integrating new attributes. Where commitments require resources not previously planned, staff will continue to explore ways to balance these needs with respect to available resources and ensure that any new requests for support are carefully considered alongside other priorities, including using a phased approach and interim solutions.

Consultations and Engagement

The IRF was developed with participation and inputs gathered through a comprehensive engagement plan which has included:

- Mississaugas of the Credit First Nations
- Six Nations of the Grand River
- Urban Indigenous peoples living or working in Guelph
- Indigenous service agencies and institutions
- Local organizations and partners

Additional engagement internally has primarily focused on the following groups and divisions:

- Mayor and Council
- Policy and Intergovernmental Relations
- Community Engagement
- Equity and Community Investment
- Guelph Museums and Culture

Attachments

Attachment-1 Indigenous Relations Framework

Report Author

Kimberly Krawczyk, Manager, Policy and Intergovernmental Relations

This report was approved by:

Jodie Sales

General Manager, Strategic Initiatives and Intergovernmental Services

Office of the Chief Administrative Officer

519-822-1260 extension 3617

jodie.sales@guelph.ca

This report was recommended by:

Jayne Holmes

Acting Chief Administrative Officer

Office of the Chief Administrative Officer

519-822-1260 extension 2248

jayne.holmes@guelph.ca