



SUBJECT: Land Acknowledgement Statement

REPORT TO: Corporate Services Committee

FROM: Brian Gilmer, Director of Corporate Services/Clerk
Kate Ingram, Communications and Community Engagement
Coordinator

DATE: Tuesday, July 2, 2019

RECOMMENDATION:

That a resolution be prepared for presentation to Council on August 6, 2019 to adopt the following Land Acknowledgement Statement, to be recited at the beginning of Council meetings and at other municipal events;

“We acknowledge that this meeting is being held on the traditional territory of the Mississauga Nations.”

And further that Council direct Municipal Staff to investigate and propose an Indigenous education program for Council and Staff, to cultivate a greater understanding of the adopted Land Acknowledgement Statement and so that it may be used with the understanding of its historical and cultural context.

BACKGROUND:

At their regular Council meeting on April 2, 2019, Council passed Resolution 20/2019 directing Staff to research and investigate the history of the land within and in proximity to municipal boundaries and to prepare a report with a draft Traditional Land Acknowledgement Statement for consideration at a future Committee of the Whole meeting.

Since that time, Staff has engaged in education and information gathering on the traditional history of the land, the land treaties and the best practices to draft a statement that is both historically accurate and culturally appropriate for the Port Hope area.

At the outset, Staff participated in information sessions hosted by the Association for Municipalities of Ontario (AMO), which provided detailed information about the process and recommended guidelines that municipal Staff should undertake. The guidelines identified by AMO included:

- Researching the history of the land within and in proximity to municipal boundaries, including treaties, active land claim litigation and Indigenous histories.
- Drafting a more general statement rather than trying to be specific, as the history of specific areas may be complex and different sources could be contradictory.
- Seeking advice from an Indigenous Relations or Reconciliation committee or an Indigenous Advisory Council, to assist with the creation of a land acknowledgement statement.
- Engaging and working with local First Nations, Métis, Indigenous organizations and community champions in the area to help in the development of a statement and protocol for its use.
- Focusing on current neighbours and Indigenous residents with an eye towards acknowledging past usage and occupants.
- Considering the implementation of a trial period (e.g. 6 months) for the statement to allow Indigenous community members an opportunity to provide feedback.
- Determining which type of meetings and events the land acknowledgement statement can be recited at, to ensure it continues to be meaningful.
- Considering cultural awareness training for Council and Staff before implementing the use of a statement, to avoid traditional land acknowledgement statements being used superficially and without an appreciation for their cultural meaning.
- Inviting Indigenous Elders or leaders to participate in introduction protocols at civic celebrations or official events to bring greetings on behalf of the local Indigenous community. Sometimes this approach is used instead of a land acknowledgement statement.

Following the guidelines above, Municipal Staff reached out to staff at Northumberland County and neighbouring municipalities to inquire about statements used by these communities and to determine the process that was undertaken to draft a Traditional Land Acknowledgement Statement. Further, Staff have reached out to Alderville First Nation. It was determined that Northumberland County recites a statement provided by the Alderville First Nation Administration Office. The Town of Cobourg and the Township of Alwicks-Haldimand have not adopted statements; however Staff in both communities have been directed by their Councils to draft a statement for presentation

at a later date.

Municipal Staff continued to independently gather information about the land treaties established by the First Nations and the Crown and determined that the Municipality of Port Hope falls within the traditional territory of the Mississauga First Nation. As such, Staff arranged a meeting with the Consultation, Lands, and Membership Supervisor at the Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation.

At the meeting, Staff was provided a brief overview of the history of the land in the Port Hope region, relevant to the First Nations territories, treaties, and entities. The complexities of the First Nations history was outlined, as was the egregious misrepresentations that have occurred within government and public organizations when Land Acknowledgement Statements have been drafted without the accompaniment of an educational component.

Throughout their research, Staff have learned that land acknowledgements are a small yet significant way to show respect and acknowledge the presence of Indigenous peoples past and present. However, drafting a statement is just one step in the process of full acknowledgement of the First Nations land and peoples.

To further guide the development of the acknowledgement process, Staff were advised to, and are currently reviewing, the Truth and Reconciliation Report. In its entirety, the full report is six volumes and provides a succinct and clear factual history and human narrative of the cultural genocide and other genocides that was and still are experienced by Indigenous communities. As part of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau accepted the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission on behalf of Canada.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was initiated in 2007 with the mandate to connect survivors of Residential Schools and with their families. The Commission emphasized that reconciliation is about establishing and maintaining a mutually respectful relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in Canada. In order for that to happen, there has to be awareness of the past, acknowledgement of the harm that has been inflicted, reparation for the causes, and action to change behaviour.

The release of the findings within the report include 94 Calls to Action that are identified practices, policies and structural changes that need to be taken to redress the previous and ongoing impacts of colonization.

Many of the recommendations incorporate the inclusion of Indigenous education. For example, and specifically relevant to the Municipality, recommendation #57 stipulates:

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 skillsbased training in intercultural competency, conflict resolution, human rights, and anti-racism.

As such, an on-going education program for Staff and Council is recommended, in accordance with the federally supported Truth and Reconciliation Commission report and recommendations, as well as to ensure that the Municipality's acknowledgement of the First Nations is appropriately delivered. As a starting point, this program could include historical and cultural presentations from representatives of the Mississaugas of Alderville, Curve Lake, Hiawatha, Scugog Island and the Chippewas of Beausoleil, Georgina Island, and Rama. These are the signatories of the 18th and 19th century treaties relevant to the lands in this region. These presentations could take place over the course of the term of council, in the form of professional development opportunities, lunch and learns and planned through other programs like the Municipality's Wellness Committee.

Significant to this report is the recognition that the development of a historically accurate and culturally appropriate Land Acknowledgement statement is an ongoing and lengthy process. While the recommended statement is sufficient and appropriate for use by Municipal Staff and Council at the start of Council meetings and at other municipal gatherings, equally as significant is the understanding of the impact of settlement, development and industry over treaty lands and how problematic it is to simply recite a statement, without a fulsome grasp of the cultural and historical reasons for the statement in the first place.

It should also be noted that over time additional education may inform further refinement to the recommended Land Acknowledgement statement.

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

At this time there are no financial resources required to adopt and implement a Land Acknowledgement statement. If Council directs Staff to establish an educational program for the Municipality, Staff will research the associated costs and propose a budget amount for that initiative.

CONCLUSION:

First Nations history and the acknowledgement statement drafting process is not to be taken lightly. As Such, Municipal Staff has researched the history of the land and gathered information that is relevant to the recommended Land Acknowledgement Statement, as directed by Council on April, 2, 2019. Through this process, Staff has also determined that an in-depth educational and cultural awareness program is recommended for Staff and Council, to ensure that use of an adopted Land Acknowledgement statement is fully understood by the Administration and not simply superficially imposed.

Respectfully submitted,

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