

## **TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION INITIATIVES IN OKOTOKS**

### **Issue**

An update on Truth and Reconciliation Initiatives in Okotoks is provided for information.

### **Motion Proposed by Administration**

That the Truth and Reconciliation Initiatives in Okotoks update be received as information.

### **Report, Analysis and Financial Implications**

In 2008 the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada was established to reveal to Canadians the complex truth about the history and ongoing legacy of the residential school system. The TRC heard from over 6,500 witnesses, including many that had attended residential schools. The findings and testimony highlighted the breadth of physical, sexual, spiritual and emotional abuse that was inflicted on indigenous peoples by the residential school system. These findings resulted in a six-volume report that documents the experiences of the survivors and the legacy left by the residential schools. One of these reports outlines 94 Calls to Action on how governments and institutions can support the process of reconciliation and was published in 2015. Of the 94 Calls to Action a number speak to what municipalities specifically can action.

Town Council identified in its 2018-21 Strategic Plan, under Strong Governance, Initiative #7, that the Town should “Align services and programs with best practices for Welcoming and Inclusive Communities and the Truth and Reconciliation document”. Administration is working to engage indigenous residents in conversations to ensure their voices are heard. Considering local as well as regional prospective ensures that full engagement is achieved as the community moves forward. The Town of Okotoks also initiated dialogue with all Five Nations in Southern Alberta including Tsuu’Tina, Stoney Nakoda and the Blackfoot Confederacy (Kainai, Sikiska, Piikani) and with Arrow Archaeology, a consulting firm from Coaldale, Alberta. These initial dialogues were held to initiate Council’s strategic priority but also to address traditional knowledge of the Nations regarding the geographic importance of Okotoks to the nations.

In June of this Year, the Town Administration, Deputy Mayor and representatives from the Nations including Elders, undertook a tour of Okotoks. The first stop on the tour was the Arts and Learning Campus site, where welcoming gifts of tobacco, prayers and a moment of silence for those lost to the residential schools’ legacy were held. The second stop on this tour was at the lands referred to as the Bible Camp lands in the Sheep River Valley. The tour then moved to the alignment of the Foothills/Okotoks Water Pipeline project including stopping at the Dunbow Residential School, which operated between 1880 and 1919 where it is known that 73 children (of 430 enrolled), died. Further, assessment of the Dunbow School and graves is being considered by

that Nations at this time. The final destination was the intake location along the confluences of the Highwood and Bow Rivers, which has been identified as an area of high significance to the Nations.

The Town is working with Arrow Archaeology and the consultation offices of all five Nations to undertake a Traditional Knowledge and Land Use Assessment (TKUA). A TKUA will take into account traditional resources such as traditional knowledge of ceremonial and medicinal plants, their ecology and preservation, specific histories and stories of the landscape that provide important cultural values such as sense of place and home. The TKUA will provide a ranking of lands in and around the Town limits based on their potential to contain important traditional resources or that have special significance to First Nations based on the lands history and cultural significance. This overall TKUA sets the stage for more detailed work and actions to be undertaken with the five nations.

In addition to the Town wide approach to traditional knowledge there are specific projects in Okotoks where detailed investigation from a traditional knowledge perspective are recommended. These include the Bible Camp Lands and the site referred to colloquially as the D'Arcy Homestead Site. In the case of the Bible Camp Lands the Town has initiated planning work for the future use of the lands for the benefit of Okotoks and region. It is understood that the land are likely an important wintering grounds for indigenous peoples.

An Historic Resources Impact Assessment (HRIA) was not required at the D'Arcy Homestead Site and *Historical Resources Act* approval from Alberta Culture was granted to Anthem United on the D'Arcy site in 2015. However, the *Statement of Justification for Historical Resources Act Requirements* notes that the area is of high historical potential that would have once formed part of a pre-contact travel corridor and are for seasonal pre-contact hunting and settlement between the Montane and Plains zones. Indigenous people will be engaged to further understand the importance of the site in terms of traditional knowledge.

Additional work with the Indigenous Nations is planned at the Arts and Learning Campus. An RFP for a future play space and peace poles in Ethel Tucker Park will be released which includes requirements for proponents to include indigenous participation. Further, the Town is working with the nations at including indigenous language interpretations for the peace poles themselves. The potential renaming of Dewdney Park is another matter that will be attended to with indigenous peoples and it is anticipated that there will be future actions that will also take place within the Town as Administration looks to addressing the Calls to Action, learning the truth about the past and coming together with indigenous peoples going forward.

The Town has also put out a request for indigenous community volunteers to help form an advisory committee to support the Town. Additional work is continuing to add members to the group so that they can begin to advise the Town. As such, an additional agenda item on the Council agenda requesting the delay of the Dewdney park naming until such time as adequate consultation is conducted.

**Strategic Plan Goals**

<input type="checkbox"/>	Manage Community Growth	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Provide Strong Governance
<input type="checkbox"/>	Provide Quality Community Infrastructure	<input type="checkbox"/>	Healthy and Safe Community
<input type="checkbox"/>	Enhance Organizational Excellence	<input type="checkbox"/>	Foster Economic Vitality
		<input type="checkbox"/>	Promote Environmental Excellence

**Governing Policies/Bylaws/Legislation or Agreements**

Truth and Reconciliation Commission 94 Calls to Action

**Public Participation Strategy**

The strategy in this case is very specifically limited to indigenous peoples.

**Alternatives for Consideration**

n/a

**CAO Comments**

This update highlights the work undertaken to ensure the Town takes responsibilities to continue to advance the recommendations contained within the TRC calls to action.

**Attachment(s)**

n/a

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