
HALDIMAND COUNTY

Report HRD-06-2022 Recommended Land Acknowledgement from the Diversity Equity and Inclusion Advisory Committee (DEIAC)

For Consideration by Council in Committee on September 20, 2022



OBJECTIVE:

To adopt the language and use of a land acknowledgement statement, as an act of reconciliation and for the purposes of recognizing the traditional territory of the Indigenous people, modern communities and the commitment to working towards common goals and objectives.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. THAT Report HRD-06-2022 Recommended Land Acknowledgement from the Diversity Equity and Inclusion Advisory Committee (DEIAC) be received;
2. AND THAT the recommended Land Acknowledgement be adopted as presented in Report HRD-06-2022;
3. AND THAT the Land Acknowledgement be read at the beginning of all regular or special Council Meetings including Council in Committee and Committee of the Whole meetings, departmental or corporate staff events, Haldimand County hosted ceremonies and at other such special events as may be determined from time to time by the Mayor, CAO, or designate;
4. AND THAT the Land Acknowledgement be provided for recommended use by the Haldimand County Police Services Board, Haldimand County Library Board and Committee of Adjustment;
5. AND THAT the Land Acknowledgement be placed on the Haldimand County website;
6. AND THAT staff be directed to further work with the DEIAC, to identify, implement and/or recommend strategies to respond to the "Calls to Action", from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, that fall within municipal jurisdiction, with a primary focus on #57, being professional development and training for all public servants;
7. AND THAT the Procedure By-law be amended to include the reading of the Land Acknowledgement as part of the regular order of business for all regular, special and emergency meetings of Council, all Council in Committee meetings and all Committee of the Whole meetings.

Prepared by: Megan Jamieson, Director, Human Resources on behalf of the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Advisory Committee

Respectfully submitted: Cathy Case, General Manager of Corporate & Social Services

Approved: Craig Manley, MCIP, RPP, Chief Administrative Officer

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Council adopted a resolution in 2021 to begin the process of establishing a Land Acknowledgement Statement for the County through advice from the County's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Advisory Committee (DEIAC). As a step towards reconciliation and with the intention of reflection and mindfulness, the County's DEIAC has developed a Land Acknowledgement statement for consideration

and use by Haldimand County Council. The statement acknowledges and thanks the various indigenous nations who have lived and continue to live in this territory and focuses on the rich indigenous history of Haldimand County, our shared responsibility for stewardship of the land, and our commitment to doing so in peace, friendship and respect. Feedback was provided by representatives from the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation and the Six Nations of the Grand River Elected Council, with some concerns noted. The DEIAC also recommends related actions to be taken by staff to complement the land acknowledgement by encouraging education and training for public servants. It is anticipated that with these steps, Haldimand County will demonstrate a commitment to reconciliation and positive focus toward relationships with Indigenous communities, organizations and First Nation governments.

BACKGROUND:

Traditional land acknowledgement statements are increasingly being used in Canada by governments, schools, post-secondary institutions, non-government organizations, and other civil institutions as a practice of reconciliation aimed at recognizing the traditional or treaty territories of Indigenous peoples.

Predominantly geared towards settlers, they are meant to invoke a process of reflection; to take a pause and build mindfulness and intention as participants begin an event or observation. Accordingly, the statements are typically made verbally at the introduction of meetings, gatherings, events or presentations. However, some are featured in print, such as on organization websites, event description pages or on a plaque(s).

Acknowledgments are commonly modelled after Indigenous protocols, including appreciation, shared resources, a strong kinship to the land and the responsibility of wise stewardship of an area. It is encouraged to recognize both the traditional territory occupants, as well as modern Indigenous living within the territory/boundary, commemorating a long history of resiliency and survival. There is often a reference to the spirit of reconciliation between Indigenous and non-indigenous peoples as well as a commitment to a shared future.

To avoid traditional land acknowledgement statements being used superficially and without an appreciation for their cultural meaning, some municipal governments have provided municipal elected representatives and staff with cultural awareness training before implementing the use of a statement. In May, 2021, Haldimand County Council, as well as senior staff, participated in a comprehensive Indigenous cultural competency training curriculum, known as Bimickaway (an Anishinabemowin word meaning to leave footprints), developed and co-facilitated by the Elders' Council, for staff across the Ontario Public Service. The Elders' Council is comprised of 13, gender-balanced, Indigenous Elders who are Knowledge Keepers from across Ontario and reflective of the diverse Indigenous Nations and regions of the province.

On September 14, 2021, Haldimand County Council passed a resolution, directing staff, through the County's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Advisory Committee (DEIAC), to introduce a land acknowledgement statement and recommendations for use.

ANALYSIS:

The Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Advisory Committee (DEIAC) is a group of community volunteers, established in late 2021. The committee's mandate and composition is outlined in the committee's Terms of Reference, approved via Report CAO-01-2021.

Through consultation with the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation (MCFN), Six Nations of the Grand River Elected Council (SNGREC), and Haldimand County's senior management team, the DEIAC developed the following Land Acknowledgement, recommended for Council's consideration:

As we gather, we humbly acknowledge that Haldimand County sits on the ancestral land of many generations of Indigenous nations, who have been here since time immemorial.

Today, this land continues to be home to many Indigenous peoples, including the Six Nations of the Grand River and the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation, as well as non-Indigenous settlers from a variety of backgrounds. As a community, we have a shared responsibility for stewardship of the land on which we live and work. We are grateful for the opportunity to work together and to share the land we all call home.

Acknowledging reminds us that our living conditions are directly related to the abundant resources of the Indigenous peoples. We commit to continue learning, reflecting on our past, and working in allyship with Indigenous communities, toward respective community goals and objectives, in peace, respect and friendship.

It is important to note that representatives from the MCFN expressed a clear desire to see inclusion of a reference to Treaty #3, the “Between the Lakes Purchase (1792)”, which is described as the agreement between the Crown and the MCFN acknowledging legal treaty rights to this area. However, the history of this land is complex and there are diverse perspectives surrounding treaty lands and territory. Due to these complexities there is not consensus among First Nations to the treaties relevant in Haldimand County and the historical details relevant to the Land Acknowledgement.

The Association of Municipalities Ontario (AMO) provided guidance to municipalities on the development of traditional Land Acknowledge statements, noting that different sources may be contradictory and advising acknowledgements to be specific to their jurisdiction or opting for a more general statement. Accordingly, the DEIAC recommends not including direct reference to treaty lands or territory and instead, recognize the rich Indigenous history of the lands and a sincere commitment to ongoing stewardship of the area.

That said, the Land Acknowledgement is meant to be a dynamic, living document and should be reviewed on a regular basis as new understandings of treaties and agreements in relation to Haldimand County evolve or where new commitments are established. Feedback from Indigenous community members, users and participants should be welcomed as a means of seeking ways to continuously improve the thought and intention. It is imperative that any person reading or using the acknowledgement is encouraged to take time to consider and reflect on its content so that it is not something that is said and forgotten, or checked off an agenda, but requires thought and intention.

Use of the Land Acknowledgement can be widespread and incorporated into a variety of meeting/event types and frequency. However, in an effort to avoid any desensitization to the content and to maintain the sincere intention to invoke reflection and mindfulness, the DEIAC recommends limiting the use of the land acknowledgement to events that would reasonably result in Council, staff and/or partners in hearing the acknowledgement 2 to 5 times per month. On that basis, the DEIAC recommends use of the land acknowledgement at the beginning of the following:

- Regular and special meetings of Council, including Council in Committee and Committee of the Whole
- Ceremonies, where hosted by Haldimand County and open to the public
- Departmental or Corporate Staff events
- Other formal events as identified by the Mayor, CAO or designate

The DEIAC would also strongly recommend that the land acknowledgement be provided for recommended use at regular and special meetings of the Police Services Board, Haldimand County Library Board, as well as the Committee of Adjustment.

In addition to verbal use at meetings and events, the DEIAC recommends that the land acknowledgement be placed on the County’s website as a written commitment to acknowledgement and reconciliation. A lot of consideration went into whether a written acknowledgement should also be featured on a plaque at the County’s main administrative and/or community facilities. However, in light

of associated costs, as well as the desire to seek feedback and continue to evolve the language, the committee is prepared to revisit the land acknowledgement as part of their 2023 work plan for the purpose of confirming a recommended approach and associated budget requirements.

Finally, staff are committed to developing supports and reference materials so that the terms, history and Nations included become familiar and those using the Land Acknowledgement can be comfortable doing so.

Additional Recommendations

Adopting a Land Acknowledgement is done in the spirit of reconciliation but is just one step among many that are required to improve local understanding and relationships with First Nations communities and those living off-reserve in Haldimand County. The DEIAC strongly recommend complementing words with action and establishing goals and objectives as a path towards reconciliation with First Nations, Metis and Inuit people and organizations in the area. Specifically, the committee recommends:

1. A thorough review of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada Report and the 94 Calls to Action, with the intent of identifying those particular calls within municipal jurisdiction and the commitment to set goals and objectives to respond to such calls over time.
2. As a priority focus, responding to the 57th Call to Action, which is professional development and training for public servants. Specifically, it is recommended that all County employees, including Council Members, Volunteer Firefighters and Haldimand County Library Board Employees, be provided locally relevant education on Indigenous history and skills-based training in intercultural competency, conflict resolution, human rights and anti-racism. It is further recommended that such training be arranged at least once per term of Council to capture any new staff.

That each department take a concerted effort to review their services for the purposes of identifying Indigenous stakeholders, potential systemic racism and to establish goals and objectives for improving local relationships and working in allyship with Indigenous people and organizations. As an example, as part of the 2022 Official Plan update (August, 2022), Council approved a key policy change recognizing the importance of honouring indigenous values and consultation and emphasizing engagement of both Six Nations of the Grand River and Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation.

3. That all staff and Council be encouraged to further their own knowledge of Indigenous people and history, such as but not limited to:
 - reading books from Indigenous authors
 - engaging and supporting Indigenous artists and commerce
 - listening to speakers at local events and at Friendship Centres
 - visiting local museums or information centres, such as the Woodlands Cultural Centre
 - conducting research into Indian residential school systems
 - reading the truth and reconciliation commission report and the 94 calls to action
 - participating in courses such as “indigenous Canada”
 - browsing and interacting with education based websites such as the Gord Downie & Chanie Wenjack Fund
 - recommending or initiating events that provide opportunities to engage, learn and work together with local Indigenous organizations and First Nations governments.
4. That the DEIAC review Indigenous relations and the spirit of truth and reconciliation, at least once annually, while determining their annual work plan or while making recommendations to staff and Council.

FINANCIAL/LEGAL IMPLICATIONS:

There are no financial implications associated with the adoption of a Land Acknowledgement. Related recommendations, as outlined are anticipated to be achieved within existing operational budgets. However, where a specific initiative, such as corporate training, may require additional funds it will be presented as a new initiative, as part of the regular annual budget deliberation process in the year which implementation is expected.

In its guidelines, AMO reminds municipal governments to be mindful that inaccurately acknowledging entities and territories may have legal implications however land acknowledgement statements are best interpreted as a venue for recognizing what is already known of past Indigenous usage and occupancy of land.

STAKEHOLDER IMPACTS:

Adoption of a Land Acknowledgement, and additional recommendations, as outlined will serve as tangible steps towards reconciliation with First Nations, Metis and Inuit Peoples, and in improving relationships with local Indigenous communities, organizations and First Nations governments.

REPORT IMPACTS:

Agreement: No

By-law: No

Budget Amendment: No

Policy: No

ATTACHMENTS:

None.