COLLABORATIVE CHANGE: CITY OF VANCOUVER IN PARTNERSHIP WITH ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES

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Reconciliation Canada is leading the way in dialogue that revitalizes the relationship between Aboriginals and all Canadians-relationships built on a foundation of openness, dignity, understanding, and hope. Reconciliation Canada was created from the vision of Gwawaenuk Elder, Chief Dr. Robert Joseph, to start an Aboriginal-led initiative that engages multi-faith and multicultural communities. Its goal is to engage Canadians in reconciliation through community initiatives and events that not only uphold the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC), but also demonstrate support for finding a New Way Forward in our relationships together.

Vancouver is known around the world as one of the best places to live and is a popular tourist attraction. It is one of the most ethnically and linguistically diverse cities in Canada with 52% of the population speaking a first language other than English. Vancouver has been host to many international conferences and events, including the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games. Its mission is to create a great city of communities that cares about its people, its environment, and the opportunities to live, work, and prosper for all of its residents.

Two historic landmark motions were recently and unanimously passed by Vancouver City Council to build lasting positive relations and partnerships with our Aboriginal communities. On July 8, 2014, Council designated Vancouver as a City of Reconciliation. This motion was the outcome of the extraordinary commitment made by the City to proclaim a year earlier on National Aboriginal Day (June 21, 2013) a Year of Reconciliation. A wide variety of initiatives were undertaken during the year that sought to bring both healing from the past and the forging of new relationships between Aboriginal Peoples and all Vancouverites.

The second historic motion took place on June 25, 2014 when Council formally acknowledged that the City of Vancouver is on the unceded traditional territory of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh First Nations: it further directed staff to invite representatives of these Nations to develop appropriate protocols for the City of Vancouver to use in conducting City business that is respectful of the traditions of welcoming, blessings, and acknowledgement of the territory.

VISION AND LEADERSHIP

Council's vision and leadership has supported and articulated a clear and decisive direction for meaningful engagement and strong relationships with the Aboriginal communities based on mutual trust through their successive decisions, motions,

FIRST NATION AND ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES OF VANCOUVER

Vancouver is located on the traditional unceded territory of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh First Nations. It has the third largest Aboriginal population of any city in Canada, with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit from all over the country. First Nations peoples are the largest Aboriginal group at 58% and Métis account for 27% of the total Aboriginal population in Vancouver. The City has a relatively young urban Aboriginal population and these youth are more likely than non-Aboriginal children to be living in a single-parent household. In addition, compared to non-Aboriginal residents, the Aboriginal population has higher unemployment rates and lower education and income levels.

and direction to City staff. There is a long standing history of engagement in the City that has culminated over time with a number of important projects and partnerships that led up to the Year of Reconciliation.

In November 2004, the Four Host First Nations Society (FHFN) comprised of Lil'wat, Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh signed a historic Protocol Agreement under which they agreed to work together to fully participate in all aspects of the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games. The agreement facilitated the engagement of the First Nations with the Government of Canada and all Vancouver 2010 partners, including the City of Vancouver. The Vancouver Organizing Committee for the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games (VANOC) included representatives of the Four Host First Nations on the Board of Directors. The partnership ensured that each of the Nations' languages, traditions, protocols, and cultures were meaningfully acknowledged, respected, and represented while maximizing opportunities and ensuring a positive legacy of the 2010 Winter Games for their communities.

Following the outstanding outcomes of the 2010 Winter Games partnership with the Four Host First Nations, Council reaffirmed the need to engage with Aboriginal communities at all levels in 2011. It resolved to build relationships with local First Nations through a Memorandum of Understanding that detailed the development of formal protocols with three Host First Nations and scheduled annual meetings between City Council and each of the First Nations' Councils. The intention behind this work was to cooperate with one another on a government to government basis.

Throughout 2010, the *Dialogues between First Nations, Urban Aboriginal and Immigrant Communities in Vancouver* project was created to strengthen relations between Aboriginal and immigrant/non-Aboriginal communities. In total, nine dialogue circles were convened bringing together members of the Aboriginal and immigrant/non-Aboriginal communities to share stories and perspectives on social inclusion and community relations. The dialogue circles generated a great deal of rich discussion around issues of identity, social inclusion, and how to build strong community relations. The circles were an integral part of the *Dialogues Project* and helped to initiate better communication among members of Aboriginal and immigrant/non-Aboriginal communities.

MAJOR COLLABORATIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH OUR ABORIGINAL PARTNERS

The City of Vancouver's partnerships have focused on three major collaborative streams:

1. URBAN ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY:

Following the Federation of Canadian Municipalities lead, the City of Vancouver agreed to five areas of high priority for working with Urban Aboriginal Peoples, namely: *1)* citizen participation and engagement, *2)* municipal and Aboriginal governance interface, *3)* Aboriginal culture as a municipal asset, *4)* economic and social development, and *5)* urban reserves, service agreements and regional partnerships.

In 2011, Council directed the establishment of an Urban Aboriginal Peoples Advisory Committee at the City with the mandate to provide advice and recommendations to Council on issues that concern Vancouver Urban Aboriginal communities. The City's Aboriginal Planner is also working on a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Metro Vancouver Aboriginal Executive Council, an organization comprised of Executive Directors from diverse urban, off-reserve Aboriginal organizations serving youth, children and families in such areas as justice, health, housing, women's support, and family violence. The MOU will articulate the relationship the City has with these service organizations for matters that affect the local urban Aboriginal community.

2. LOCAL FIRST NATIONS

In 2011, Council also directed City staff to develop an engagement structure with the three local First Nations, Musqueam, Squamish, and Tseil-Waututh to:

- Develop formal protocol for engaging with the three Host First Nations on City businesses, including public hearings and City's committees;

- Schedule annual meetings between City Council and First Nations' councils on a government to government basis.

In 2013, the Mayor and Council met with each of the Chiefs and Council of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh Nations to discuss partnerships, issues of concern, and opportunities to strengthen their relationships. The respective governments learned more about each other's activities and goals, and shared aspirations for social, economic, and environmental health. Establishing working relationships with the three Host First Nations is an ongoing priority for the City.

3. RECONCILIATION CANADA

The Year of Reconciliation was conceived following a meeting between members of Reconciliation Canada and the City's Urban Aboriginal Peoples Advisory Committee. Combining planned programming with new initiatives, this collaboration has resulted in a strong partnership with many exciting possibilities for the future. For the Walk for Reconciliation and other associated events, Reconciliation Canada and the City worked closely along with other community partners on planning many aspects of the events. Throughout the year many other programs were explored, and the relationship between the City and Reconciliation Canada was solidified. The two organizations will continue to work closely to support reconciliation efforts with an eye on Legacy. The goal is to deepen the dialogue and create the shared understanding that is the foundation of a new way forward together.

> *"Let us find a way to belong to this time and place together. Our future and the well-being of all our children rests with the kind of relationships we build today."*
>
> Chief Dr. Robert Joseph, Ambassador,
> Reconciliation Canada

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE YEAR OF RECONCILIATION

RECONCILIATION WEEK

The City of Vancouver initiated a week of reconciliation activities to take place from September 16-22, 2013, including public events hosted by The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) and Reconciliation Canada. Lighting the Sacred Fire of Reconciliation was a symbolic beginning for Reconciliation Week. False Creek was the site of an All Nations Canoe Gathering which brought together Aboriginal Peoples and the community at large. Musqueam, Squamish, and Tseil-Waututh hosts each delivered their welcome and traditional protocol was observed. Residential School survivors paddled to receive recognition and honour. Canoes are an important symbol of Aboriginal culture and spiritual expression. In a powerful visual metaphor, survivors were joined on the water by other vessels such as dragon boats and kayaks. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission held their sixth national event at the PNE grounds where those affected by the legacy of the Indian Residential Schools shared their experiences with the Commission and the public. More than 40,000 people attended the event, including 5,000 students from across B.C. who participated in activities about residential schools on a special Education Day.

For many years, Chief Dr. Robert Joseph, Reconciliation Canada's Ambassador, had a dream of witnessing thousands of people of every culture and faith walking together for a shared tomorrow. This dream became a reality on September 22, 2013 when more than 70,000 people weathered the rain to demonstrate their commitment to A New Way Forward, one that rebuilds relationships between Aboriginal peoples and all Canadians. Representing Canada's many cultures, the crowd embodied "Namwayut" – We Are All One. After a keynote speech by Dr. Bernice King (Dr. Martin Luther King's daughter) the historic walk began, marking both the end of Reconciliation Week and a new beginning for Aboriginal Peoples and all Canadians. The event was voted as the #2 Top Newsmaker of the Year by CBC News Vancouver.

During Reconciliation Week, the City supported Reconciliation Canada and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission by providing funding, coordinating permits, and allowing the usage of city sites and services. Corporate Communications created promotional materials and organized the recruitment of attendees and staff volunteers for the Walk for Reconciliation.

OTHER ACTIVITIES AND EVENTS

Reconciliation Dialogue Workshops across British Columbia reached leaders from all sectors, including government, industry, education, business, and community. They helped provide transformative opportunities for cross-cultural dialogue among diverse groups and a shared understanding of our collective history.

At the Aboriginal Reconciliation Summit in June 2013, participants were invited to provide input on what it would mean to be a City of Reconciliation. This input was presented to the Urban Aboriginal Peoples' Advisory Committee and City Council for consideration with respect to future action.

"Songs for Reconciliation", a Park Board initiative, was led by the esteemed award winning Kwakwa_ka_'wakw artist William Wasden Jr. who hosted participatory community art projects in the spirit of Reconciliation. The work brought together Vancouver residents of all ages to sing the traditional Kwakwa_ka_'wakw family songs, dance and create personal regalia as a way to share diverse identities, linking family history and heritage.

Branches of the Vancouver Public Library participated in the Year of Reconciliation with initiatives such as the Aboriginal Storyteller-in-Residence and the Storyteller Program Series. The latter was an innovative program bringing school-aged children together to learn about 'Namwayut'–"We Are All One"–and gently introducing them to the history of residential schools. Public awareness panels were also offered in partnership with Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada, Amnesty International, and the Hul'qumi'num Treaty group to examine justice for Aboriginal Peoples in Canada.

In addition, a Lunch & Learn Speaker Series for staff raised awareness of Aboriginal Peoples and the Year of Reconciliation. The series included two interactive *Theatre for Living* presentations exploring residential school history and present day impacts.

Reconciliation Canada initiatives continue to promote an environment that fosters positive relations and relevant opportunities for Aboriginal Peoples and all Canadians to achieve their optimum potential. Initiatives include:

- Reconciliation Dialogue Sessions & Action Plans
- Reconciliation-Based Leadership Training & Core Competencies Assessments
- Sustainable Economic Reconciliation Dialogue Sessions & Actions Plans
- Public Awareness & Outreach

ONGOING COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS

A significant body of work is being implemented by civic departments in consultation with Aboriginal communities. A few examples are listed below:

MUNICIPAL SERVICES

The Musqueam Services Agreement is a comprehensive long range contract for municipal services. The agreement, signed in November 2013, establishes a partnership in which the Musqueam Indian Band will acquire a wide variety of services through the City of Vancouver for market rates. Through the agreement, Musqueam can source a complete range of municipal services.

HOUSING AND SHELTER NEEDS

Recognizing that Aboriginal Peoples are particularly vulnerable to the conditions that contribute to homelessness as a legacy of the residential school system, the City has supported many programs to increase Aboriginal Peoples' access to shelters, housing, and support services. These include an Aboriginal Children's Village in 2013 in partnership with the Vancouver Aboriginal Child and Family Services Society (VACFSS); a 2013 Homelessness Action Week Grant, an Aboriginal Homeless Emergency Action Team (HEAT) Shelter, and a $100,000 grant to explore an Aboriginal Shelter/Transitional Housing Project in the downtown eastside.

EMPLOYMENT

Building on the strong direction from Council, the City's Equal Employment Opportunity Program and Human Resources forged two productive partnerships with the Aboriginal Community Career Employment Services Society (ACCESS) for its 3-1-1 Contact Centre representatives and clerical positions.

ENHANCING PUBLIC AWARENESS

A guide, "First Peoples: A Guide for Newcomers" was launched in 2014 in partnership with Vancouver Community College. The guide aims to increase mutual understanding and strengthen relations among Aboriginal and newcomer communities. The Park Board's annual Remarkable Women Series saw Lila Johnston from Squamish Nation Community being honoured in 2014.

STAFF AND FUNDING SUPPORT

Beginning in February 2014, two new Social Planner positions were created with a focus on vulnerable populations. One of the positions focuses primarily on Aboriginal communities affected by sex work and sexual exploitation. Community Services and other Social Policy Grants focus on capacity building and support for Aboriginal children, youth, and families and are aimed at mitigating the conditions that cause vulnerability for marginalized populations. In 2013, Aboriginal organizations received grants totaling $341,000.

PROMOTING ABORIGINAL ARTS & CULTURE

Investments in projects such as Carnegie Aboriginal Artisan and Cultural Sharing Programs, Public Art for Reconciliation, Artists in the Atrium, Aboriginal Artisan program, Oppenheimer Park Programming, Britannia Carving Pavilion and Radius Mural Project avenues for cultural and artistic expression and opportunities for development. The endeavours showcase Aboriginal traditional and contemporary arts and meaningful collaboration with diverse communities of Vancouver.

HEALTH AND WELLNESS:

The Mayor's Task Force on Mental Health and Addiction creates a framework for providing access to appropriate wellness supports, and includes a focus on the needs of the Aboriginal population, with key components targeting youth and traditional healing.

CREATING A SAFER CITY:

The Year of Reconciliation has been a prime opportunity for the Vancouver Police Department to focus on the particular challenges faced by the Aboriginal community. An innovative strategy of an interactive "Lunch with the Chief" with Carnegie Community Centre and Sister Watch provides an opportunity for Downtown Eastside (DTES) citizens to meet and share stories with police in their community. The aim is to increase police understanding of life contexts and backgrounds of citizens living in the DTES and provide them with a broader range of options in dealing with safety and security issues for unique communities.

YOUTH:

Aboriginal youth, in a partnership with ALIVE and Motivate Canada, are bringing connections with their culture, traditions, and resources in to these centres. The Eastside Aboriginal Space for Youth (EASY) program from 2008 to 2013 addressed urban Aboriginal gang issues through a reduction in risk factors by providing a late night resource, recreational activities, adult and peer mentoring, and cultural workshops based on Aboriginal traditions.

A NEW WAY OF LIVING AND WORKING

During the past year Vancouver has witnessed to extraordinary moments that speak to the possibility of reconciliation: the re-establishment of protocol with the welcome ceremony by the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh First Nations in the All Nations Canoe Gathering, the witnessing of the testimony of residential school survivors at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's BC National Event, the rain-drenched commitment of more than 70,000 people walking in a September downpour to stand together and celebrate reconciliation, and the extraordinary work the City is undertaking in collaboration with our urban Aboriginal communities. These initiatives have brought Vancouverites together to work, learn, sew, drum, weave, sing, carve, eat, connect, and share the truth of the past.

The City of Vancouver recognizes that reconciliation with the Aboriginal communities is more than a priority. According to Mayor Gregor Robertson, "Through the process of reconciliation we have the promise of building a common future, a future in which all of Vancouver's children – have an equal opportunity to achieve their dreams..." (Year of Reconciliation Proclamation 2014). By building Aboriginal inclusion into its operations, the City ensures that not only do Aboriginal Peoples have a voice, but staff has a greater cultural understanding of the community. We believe that by collaborating with a common purpose and ensuring efforts from the inside out, together we will pave a new way of living and working together for present and future generations.