



Administrative Report

Office of the Director of Council & Community Services/Clerk

To: Warden McNamara and Members of Essex County Council

From: Mary Birch
Director of Council & Community Services/Clerk

Date: Wednesday, October 06, 2021

Subject: Land Acknowledge Statement

Report #: 2021-1006-CCS-R008 -MB

Purpose

To recommend that Essex County Council adopt a Land Acknowledge Statement, to be recited at the beginning of Essex County Council meetings and other County of Essex events.

Background

A land acknowledgement is an act of reconciliation. It recognizes that long before other peoples arrived in Canada, Indigenous Peoples were inhabitants and stewards of the land and that they continue to play a vital role in its future. This recognition commemorates the close relationship Indigenous Peoples have with the land. It is also an important step in increasing awareness of Canada's Indigenous history and addressing the damage caused by attempts to eradicate or diminish Indigenous culture.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission, established in 2009 to hear the stories of survivors and address the legacy of residential schools, issued 94 calls to action in 2015. Recommendation No. 57 states:

"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 (UNDRIP), Treaties and Aboriginal rights, Indigenous law, and Aboriginal–Crown relations. This will require skills-based training in intercultural competency, conflict resolution, human rights, and anti-racism.”

This education begins with recognition. Increasingly, governments, schools, non-governmental organizations and even businesses are adopting land acknowledgement statements as an early step in a process of reconciliation. These statements are read at the beginning of meetings, gatherings and events. To be meaningful, the reading of a land acknowledgement must be done deliberately and respectfully with the full attention of all those present.

Discussion

Land acknowledgements recognize Indigenous traditional and treaty territories. The history of these territories is not always agreed upon, so statements are often general and strive to be respectful of all views. Several municipalities and organizations in the County of Essex have adopted land acknowledgement statements after researching the Indigenous history of the region. The statements are similar, and some municipalities have said their statements may be changed based on further input.

Most recently, the Town of Essex adopted a land acknowledgement in June 2021 for a trial period of six months. The City of Windsor, in July 2021, adopted its land acknowledgement as a living document open to revisions for a year.

In preparing this report, the recently adopted land acknowledgement statements and reports to Councils for the Towns of Essex and Amherstburg, and the City of Windsor were reviewed. Also reviewed were the land acknowledgement statements of the Essex Region Conservation Authority, Municipality of Chatham-Kent, University of Windsor, Windsor-Essex Catholic District School Board, Greater Essex County District School Board and Point Pelee National Park.

All of these statements acknowledge the Three Fires Confederacy of First Nations, comprised of the Ojibway, the Odawa, and the Potawatomie Peoples. Some, including those for Amherstburg and Essex, also refer to the Huron-Wendat Peoples.

In 1790, the British colonial government’s agent, Alexander McKee, negotiated a treaty with representatives of all these peoples known as Treaty No. 2, or the McKee Purchase. The treaty covered most of the land in

the southwestern tip of Ontario. In 1833, Treaty No. 35 was signed by the Huron-Wendat living on the Huron Reserve, which was on land in parts of present-day Amherstburg, LaSalle and Essex.

The Caldwell First Nation, part of the Three Fires Confederacy, was consulted about the wording for a land acknowledgement statement for the County of Essex. The response was that a statement like the one used by the Essex Region Conservation Authority, which incorporates the same territory, would be appropriate. The Authority's acknowledgement does not specifically refer to the Huron-Wendat but encompasses the contributions of "local and regional First Nations and all of the Original Peoples of Turtle Island."

A special thanks is extended to our Communications Officer, Ellen van Wageningen, for her research on local Land Acknowledgements.

If Council adopts the recommendation of this report, Administration will prepare the next revision to the Essex County Procedure By-law to include an amendment, codifying the reciting of a Land Acknowledgement Statement at meetings of Essex County Council.

The adoption of a Land Acknowledgement, as well as the recent recognition of the National Day of Truth and Reconciliation by Essex County Council, has prompted Administration to look for opportunities to promote an educational and cultural awareness program for Staff. As a first step, Administration has recently obtained a membership to the Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion.

Financial Implications

At this time there are no financial resources required to adopt and implement a Land Acknowledgement Statement. Expenditures for memberships and training resources can be accommodated within the current budget and will be expanded upon in future budgets.

Recommendation

That the Essex County Council adopt the following Land Acknowledgement Statement, as a living document, open for revisions for one year to allow for feedback and advice regarding its ongoing use:

We (I) begin by acknowledging that the land on which we gather is the traditional territory of the Three Fires Confederacy of First

Nations, comprised of the Ojibway, Odawa and Potawatomie Peoples. To recognize the land is an expression of gratitude to those whose territory you reside on, and a way of honouring the Indigenous people who have been living and working on the land from time immemorial. We value the significant historical and contemporary contributions of local and regional First Nations and all the Original Peoples of Turtle Island.

Respectfully Submitted

Mary Birch

Mary Birch Director of Council & Community Services/Clerk

Concurred With,

Mike Galloway

Mike Galloway, Chief Administrative Officer