



Administrative Report

To: Warden MacDonald and Members of Essex County Council

From: Donald McArthur, Manager, Communications and Organizational Development

Date: Wednesday, December 4, 2024

Subject: Advancement of Truth and Reconciliation Program

Report #: 2024-1204-LCS-R41-DM

Purpose

The purpose of this Administrative Report is to provide County Council with information about requested revisions to the County's Land Acknowledgement Statement and information about the steps taken to educate staff about Truth and Reconciliation and build respectful, reciprocal relationships with Indigenous Peoples as outlined in the Truth and Reconciliation's calls to action.

Background

In October 2021, County Council adopted a Land Acknowledgment which is read at the beginning of Council meetings and other significant County events. It is also featured prominently in official County documents, like the County's Strategic Plan and 2025 Budget book.

At the time of its adoption, it was recognized that the Land Acknowledgement would be a living document that would be reviewed and amended over time. An amended version was subsequently approved by County Council in September of 2023.

The amended version was crafted after consultations with Carrie Ann Peters, cultural and language coordinator with Caldwell First Nation, and reviews of updated Land Acknowledgement statements from local municipalities and the Essex Region Conservation Authority.

The amended version specifically mentions Caldwell First Nation by name and reads as follows:

We acknowledge the land on which the County of Essex is located is the traditional territory of the Three Fires Confederacy of First Nations, comprised of the Ojibway, Odawa and Potawatomie Peoples. We specifically

recognize Caldwell First Nation and other First Nations which have provided significant historical and contemporary contributions to this region. We also value the contributions of all Original Peoples of Turtle Island, who have been living and working on this land from time immemorial.

When it approved the updated Land Acknowledgement statement, County Council asked for an annual update on the County's Truth and Reconciliation efforts.

Discussion

Advancing Truth and Reconciliation is identified as a Strategic Goal and Direction in the County's Strategic Plan, approved by Council in December of 2023.

"The County aspires to be an engaged, collaborative, and supportive partner to Indigenous (First Nations, Metis, and Inuit) communities and peoples guided by the principles of Truth and Reconciliation," says the Strategic Plan. "To achieve this, the County will work to build relationships with Indigenous governments and peoples through an ongoing dialogue and consultation on matters of shared interest."

Several members of County Council and a member of County Administration attended an inaugural conference last December organized by Caldwell First Nation that brought together leaders from across the County. It was billed as a "Reconciliation in Action" conference and its goal was to deepen the relationships between municipal leaders and Caldwell First Nation leaders.

The County strives to keep Truth and Reconciliation efforts top of mind by reading a Land Acknowledgement Statement at the beginning of meetings and including it in official County publications, like the Strategic Plan and annual Budget book.

As stated above, the County first adopted a Land Acknowledgement Statement in 2021 and recognized it then as a "living document" that would be reviewed and amended over time. In 2023, after consultations with Caldwell First Nation, Council approved an amended statement that specifically mentioned Caldwell First Nation.

Caldwell First Nation, through feedback recently submitted as part of the Official Plan process, is asking the County to consider additional revisions to its Land Acknowledgement. Caldwell First Nation has suggested that the Acknowledgement:

- include language that speaks to Caldwell's shared responsibility to steward the lands;

- include a reference to the McKee Treaty of 1790 and the land claim between Caldwell and the Crown in 2010;
- be accompanied, when it is delivered at Council meetings, by a “personal reflection ... on why we do territorial acknowledgements to avoid it becoming a standard check box exercise”; and
- be accompanied by a traditional territorial map “to demonstrate to all municipalities within the County whose traditional territory encompasses their municipality.”

Administration intends to reach out to Caldwell First Nation to discuss these suggestions and will bring a future report to Council should any revisions to the County’s existing statement or processes be recommended.

When it approved the amended Land Acknowledgement Statement, Council asked for an annual update on steps taken to educate staff and build respectful, reciprocal relationships with Indigenous Peoples, as outlined in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s calls to action.

In 2024, the County leveraged its partnership with the Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion to provide educational opportunities for staff throughout the year. These opportunities included access to a knowledge repository of videos and articles and a free webinar ahead of the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation called Pathways Towards Truth and Reconciliation.

Staff were encouraged to wear an orange shirt or ribbon in honour of Orange Shirt day in September and gathered outside the Civic Centre to hoist a flag to mark the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation on September 30th.

The County has purchased the Survivors’ Flag, which will be flown outside the County's Administration Building every year in honour of the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. The Survivors’ Flag is an expression of remembrance, meant to honour residential school Survivors and all the lives and communities impacted by the residential school system in Canada. Each element depicted on the flag was carefully selected by Survivors from across Canada, who were consulted in the flag’s creation.

The National Day for Truth and Reconciliation is a paid holiday for County staff, who were encouraged to take time to reflect and participate in local events. Those events were promoted on the County’s intranet and included events being hosted by Caldwell First Nation as well as events being hosted by Amherstburg, Kingsville, and Tecumseh.

In September, the County's communications staff began rolling out on the County’s intranet weekly information posts dedicated to learning more about Truth and Reconciliation. The information posts invited staff “to take 10

minutes a week to embark on a Truth and Reconciliation Journey to learn about the Indigenous Peoples and the legacy of residential schools.”

The posts were published every week in September, October, and November and will continue through to the end of 2024.

Links to these snippets were emailed out to all employees weekly and the series of posts was and continues to be promoted on County screens visible in County facilities, including EMS bases, the Sun Parlor Home, Road depots, Essex Windsor Solid Waste Authority sites, and the County's Administration Building. A link to the series of posts is featured on the homepage of the County's intranet site and the posts are available for employees to read on demand.

The posts featured excerpts from the final report of the National Commission on Truth and Reconciliation to “promote understanding, reflection, discussion and action.”

The most recent post published prior to the preparation of this Report linked to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and featured this quote about practicing reconciliation from the final report on the National Commission on Truth and Reconciliation:

“Together, Canadians must do more than just talk about reconciliation; we must learn how to practice reconciliation in our everyday lives – within ourselves and our families, and in our communities, governments, places of worship, schools, and workplaces. To do so constructively, Canadians must remain committed to the ongoing work of establishing and maintaining respectful relationships.”

The proposed 2025 Budget includes funding for a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion consultant to help guide, among other things, the County's ongoing Truth and Reconciliation efforts.

Financial Implications

The 2025 budget includes funding for a consultant to develop a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion plan to support truth and reconciliation efforts. Recommendations from the plan will guide funding needs for 2026 and future budgets, with anticipated ongoing annual costs for implementing key initiatives.

Consultations

David Sundin, Director, Legislative and Legal Services/County Solicitor

Strategic Plan Alignment

Working as Team Essex County	Growing as Leaders in Public Service Excellence	Building a Regional Powerhouse
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Scaling Sustainable Services through Innovation <input type="checkbox"/> Focusing "Team Essex County" for Results <input type="checkbox"/> Advocating for Essex County's Fair Share 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Being an Employer with Impact <input type="checkbox"/> A Government Working for the People <input type="checkbox"/> Promoting Transparency and Awareness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Providing Reliable Infrastructure for Partners <input type="checkbox"/> Supporting Dynamic and Thriving Communities Across the County <input type="checkbox"/> Harmonizing Action for Growth <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Advancing Truth and Reconciliation

Recommendation

That Essex County Council receive report number 2024-1204-LCS-R41-DM, Advancement of Truth and Reconciliation Program, as information.

Approvals

Respectfully Submitted,

Donald McArthur

Donald McArthur, Manager, Communications and Organizational Development

Concurred With,

David Sundin

David Sundin, BA (Hons), LL.B., Director, Legislative and Legal Services/County Solicitor

Concurred With,

Sandra Zwiers

Sandra Zwiers, MAcc, CPA, CA, Chief Administrative Officer

Appendix	Title
N/A	N/A