



STAFF REPORT ACTION REQUIRED

Statement of Commitment to Aboriginal communities in Toronto – Towards A Framework for Urban Aboriginal Relations in Toronto

Date:	May 27, 2010
To:	Executive Committee
From:	Joseph P. Pennachetti
Wards:	All
Reference Number:	

SUMMARY

This report responds to City Council's decision to develop an Urban Aboriginal Framework for Toronto in consultation with Aboriginal communities in Toronto. This report recommends a Statement of Commitment towards the Aboriginal people of Toronto and the development of an Action Plan in support of the Statement of Commitment. The Aboriginal Affairs Committee has been consulted on this Statement of Commitment and has endorsed it.

The City of Toronto currently works with local Aboriginal communities on a wide spectrum of Aboriginal affairs and has established an Aboriginal Affairs Committee to provide advice to City Council. A Toronto Urban Aboriginal Framework, which will provide a guiding framework that brings together community aspirations and City responsibilities, is being developed in two phases.

This report provides the result of the first phase is the proposed Statement of Commitment which has been grounded in a consultative and a research process, to outline the principles which are important to achieving strong Aboriginal-Municipal relations. It will guide the City in its on-going relationships with Aboriginal communities, discussions with other municipalities and orders of government and inform all aspects of departmental policy, planning and service delivery throughout the Toronto

Public Service in addition to being the foundation for completing Phase Two, the development of an Action Plan.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The City Manager recommends that:

1. City Council adopt Appendix A as the City of Toronto Statement of Commitment to Aboriginal communities in Toronto;
2. The City Manager be requested to report to Council on the development of an Action Plan in consultation with the Aboriginal Affairs Committee to give effect to the commitments contained in Appendix A;
3. Because of the increasing size of Aboriginal communities in urban areas across Canada, the City of Toronto continue to meet with Federal and Provincial officials to discuss the City's formal role in the policy development process regarding urban Aboriginal issues and that the City's participation be guided by the commitments outlined in Appendix A; and
4. City Council express its appreciation to the members of the Aboriginal Affairs Committee for their partnership role in the development of this Statement of Commitment and to members of the Aboriginal community for their participation in this process.

Financial Impact

The recommendations in this report have no direct financial impact.

EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT

The development of an Urban Aboriginal Framework for the City of Toronto in consultation with the Aboriginal Affairs Committee and Toronto's Aboriginal community affirms Council's commitment to the principle of Aboriginal self determination and to establish mechanisms for full civic participation by all residents of in the social, economic, cultural and political life in the City. Moreover the commitments outlined in this report contribute to the recognition of Aboriginal identity as being distinct while at the same time creating a sense of belonging.

DECISION HISTORY

City Council adopted the report of the Task Force on Community Access and Equity in December 1999. Council recognised the unique status and cultural diversity of

Aboriginal communities and their right to self-determination. City Council also established a community advisory committee on Aboriginal Affairs.

<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/1999/agendas/council/cc/cc991214/pof11rpt/cl001.pdf>

In 2003, City Council approved a Plan of Action for the Elimination of Racism and Discrimination and decided to develop a Toronto Urban Aboriginal Strategy and Aboriginal Office in accordance with the principle of Aboriginal self-determination in partnership with the Aboriginal communities and other orders of government.

<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/2003/agendas/council/cc030414/pof3rpt/cl003.pdf>

In August 2009, City Council considered a report on the development of an Urban Aboriginal Strategy which outlined a consultative process, research activities and timeline for its development.

<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2009/ex/bgrd/backgroundfile-21490.pdf>

ISSUE BACKGROUND

A. Urban Aboriginal communities in Toronto – Size, structure and research

About half of Canada's Aboriginal community live in urban areas, about half of whom are under the age of 25. Although the official 2006 Census data report an Aboriginal population of about 13 600, many researchers and service providers have observed that there is considerable "undercounting". In 1999, the City's Task Force on Community Access and Equity noted that while some members of the Aboriginal community are permanent Toronto residents and are second and third generation residents, many also move back and forth between Toronto, their home reserves and communities and/or other cities across Canada. The City's Task Force on Community Access and Equity reported that the estimates of Aboriginal people living in Toronto numbered between 65,000 and 100,000.

A 2007 study prepared for the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) noted that social exclusion of Aboriginal peoples in urban areas is a significant issue for municipalities to consider and that municipalities need to understand the context of Aboriginal aspirations and needs as this understanding has implications for future urban development, in physical, social, economic and cultural sectors.

Studies on the socio-economic context of urban Aboriginal people are currently limited. Census data indicate that the Aboriginal population in Toronto is rapidly growing, with an increase of almost 20% since 2001. The 2006 Census data showed that compared to non-Aboriginal residents, the Aboriginal population is younger and has higher unemployment rates, a lower annual income, and a greater likelihood of a single-parent household.

With respect to community structures, there are approximately 40 Aboriginal organizations and/or formal associations in Toronto. Additionally, several network groups and "tables" exist with a purpose of sharing resources and/or increasing

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collaborative planning efforts. While there is no single representative body for the First Nations, Métis, or Inuit communities, there is a wealth of organization within the communities with vast opportunities for the City to work in supportive and complementary partnerships.

Three important research projects are underway and these will be important as the City moves towards the second phase of developing an Action Plan for its Urban Aboriginal Framework. These research activities are being undertaken by the Toronto Aboriginal Social Services Association (TASSA), Toronto Public Health and the Environics Institute. The City is a participant in all three research programs.

The Toronto Aboriginal Research Project (TARP), initiated by the Toronto Aboriginal Social Services Association, is underway and is expected to identify the prominent socio-economic issues affecting First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people in Toronto. The findings of this study are expected in the summer 2010.

Toronto Public Health has established a Roundtable on Aboriginal Health in Toronto which is community-based group. The research plan includes activities that aim to accurately understand and document the demographic make-up of the Aboriginal population in Toronto.

In April 2010, the Environics Institute released the national results of the Urban Aboriginal Peoples Study which was conducted in 11 cities across Canada. Reports on specific cities will be available later in 2010. The national results of the Environics study found that while maintaining ties to their ancestral communities, for the majority of urban Aboriginal peoples *"the city is home"*.

Other key findings of the Environics Study were that:

- urban Aboriginal peoples are seeking to become a significant and visible part of the urban landscape;
- most urban Aboriginal peoples are likely to feel connected to Aboriginal communities in their cities;
- the nature of urban Aboriginal community varies from city to city; the city is a venue for the creative development of Aboriginal culture particularly in Toronto and Vancouver;
- Aboriginal peoples are able to retain their cultural identity in the city;
- urban Aboriginal peoples feel that family and a balanced lifestyle are essential ingredients of a successful life; and
- the pursuit of higher education is the leading life aspiration of urban Aboriginal peoples.

The study also noted that:

- despite significant cultural and historical differences, First Nations peoples, Métis and Inuit living in Canadian cities share many values and aspirations;
- seven in ten urban Aboriginal peoples are proud to be Canadian; and
- a stronger Aboriginal political identity coincides with a stronger Canadian

identity.

These findings hold great promise. They indicate that urban Aboriginal residents of large cities, including Toronto, aspire to become fully engaged in all aspects of civic life.

B. Developing the City of Toronto's Urban Aboriginal Framework

The development of the City of Toronto's Urban Aboriginal Framework was undertaken as a consultative process with the City of Toronto's Aboriginal Affairs Committee, which established a Sub-committee to work with a staff project team. An interdivisional staff working group was also formed to advise the staff project team on the work program.

The Aboriginal Affairs Sub-committee advised that the City's Urban Aboriginal Framework should be undertaken in two phases, with phase one focussing on the development of a Statement of Commitment on Municipal Aboriginal Relations to be followed by Phase Two, the development of an Action Plan to give effect to the Statement of Commitment.

The following activities were undertaken:

- eight focus groups involving nearly 80 participants were held;
- discussions were held with Federal and Provincial officials;
- an inventory of initiatives targeted to Aboriginal communities by City divisions was prepared;
- a scan of relevant practices by other Canadian municipalities was undertaken; and
- a literature review on relevant research was undertaken.

The results of this research and discussions are being compiled into a separate resource document for distribution to all who have participated in this process.

C. Consultation and research findings

C (a) Focus groups

The purpose of holding focus groups was:

- to understand how City practices can best reflect the City's commitment to the inherent rights of Aboriginal people;
- to increase dialogue with urban Aboriginal communities in Toronto and stakeholders;
- to share information about the City's governmental responsibilities to the urban Aboriginal community as residents of Toronto; and
- to share information about the development of the City's urban Aboriginal framework.

Eight focus groups, involving nearly 80 participants, were held. Five of these sessions were held with members of Aboriginal communities, two with City staff who have experience working with local Aboriginal communities, and two with representatives from other municipalities and orders of government. The community focus groups were held at Native Women's Centre, Native Child and Family Services, Kingston-Galloway Action for Neighbourhood Change and Toronto City Hall.

Discussions focussed around a set of questions and the following theme which was vetted by the Aboriginal Affairs Sub-Committee:

“The City of Toronto recognises and respects the unique status and cultural diversity among the Aboriginal communities of Toronto. The City of Toronto commits to working with the Aboriginal communities in Toronto to achieve the right of Aboriginal persons living in Toronto to choose how to live their lives and structure their communities.”

Participants in the focus groups noted that the presence of Toronto's Aboriginal communities was not visible and that the invisibility of Aboriginal culture throughout the city created a sense of social exclusion. While many expressed appreciation for the rich sense of ethnic and cultural diversity within Toronto, they simultaneously expressed their belief that Aboriginal people have not been equally represented in the City's celebrations of diversity. The following summarizes a sample of Aboriginal voices from these sessions.

- *The significant needs and barriers faced by Aboriginal Torontonians are unique to Aboriginal people and stem from experiences that are different than those experienced by other Toronto communities.*
- *'Aboriginal' is not a homogenous term. Aboriginal communities in Toronto include First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities. There is a rich diversity within and between these distinct Aboriginal communities.*
- *There is an integral connection between Aboriginal well-being and the public awareness of Aboriginal history in Toronto and in Canada. By 'history', we include more recent practices directly experienced by today's generation, in addition to the use of local land by Aboriginal ancestors.*
- *Aboriginal individuals and communities maintain a holistic philosophical approach to themselves, their communities, and their relationships with the world in which they exist. This Aboriginal worldview of communities is of central importance to the well-being of Aboriginal individuals.*
- *Allocating capacity building resources will strengthen the ability of Aboriginal communities to plan/deliver Aboriginal programs.*
- *Hosting regular community engagement activities (e.g. forums) would allow the City to hear from and to update Aboriginal residents.*
- *Flexibility in City standards and protocols is important. Bureaucracy often acts as a barrier to achieving inclusive engagement.*

- *Increasing the accessibility of City practices and building strong relationships with Aboriginal communities are inter-dependent goals.*
- *Respecting the wisdom and experience of Elders by including them in leadership roles is critical to working in appropriate collaborative ways.*
- *Due to the vast diversity that exists within the community, the City will need to make efforts to form direct relations with a wide spectrum of community representatives. Thus, the City should solicit input from individuals and groups through an inclusive process.*

These discussions identified barriers that limit the ways in which First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people in Toronto participate in decision-making practices. Barriers which were identified include issues of trust with governmental bodies, lack of knowledge about partnership opportunities, and perceptions of social exclusion. Participants have noted that many of the City's practices in recent years have been planned and/or delivered with engagement from Aboriginal communities; however opportunities for greater consistency and more appropriate measures exist. On-going engagement and collaboration with Aboriginal communities are particularly important because of the value placed upon programs and services that are planned, led and delivered by Aboriginal people. To meet this requirement, there is an expectation that the City will assume a supportive role aimed at capacity building and sustainability of local Aboriginal organizations.

C (b) Municipal Aboriginal Programs

With respect to municipal Aboriginal frameworks or strategies, both Winnipeg and Edmonton have established formal programs. These programs were created in collaboration with the local Aboriginal communities and describe the respective cities' commitments, acknowledgements and responding action items.

In 2000, the City of Winnipeg endorsed the Maskwachees Declaration which provided a commitment by the City to be a "partner with the Aboriginal Community to reinforce traditional, cultural and spiritual values while addressing issues related to poverty, unemployment, training and education". First Steps: Municipal Aboriginal Pathways was approved in 2003 to establish "partnerships and the effective use of municipal tools to levels [through which] the City can identify pathways to promote sustainable community development and to build a better future for Winnipeg's Aboriginal citizens". This Pathways program identified strategic initiatives to be undertaken in employment, safety, economic development, quality of life, outreach and education.

In August 2005, Edmonton City Council adopted a Declaration aimed at "Strengthening Relationships between the City of Edmonton and Urban Aboriginal People". The Declaration addressed the following themes; celebrating past Aboriginal contributions, recognising past injustices, acknowledging unique challenges faced by Aboriginal people, valuing Aboriginal contributions, appreciating the legitimacy of Aboriginal autonomy and the role of Aboriginal people in the City's future.

Other municipalities have developed programs for Aboriginal communities, with some participating in the Federal Urban Aboriginal Strategy (below), but have not yet developed a guiding policy framework or corporate approaches.

C (c) Practices of other Orders of Government:

The Government of Canada established an Urban Aboriginal Strategy (UAS) in 1997 which is carried out in 13 urban centres across Canada. Urban areas participating in the federal strategy are: Prince George, Vancouver, Edmonton, Calgary, Lethbridge, Price Albert, Saskatoon, Regina, Thomson, Winnipeg, Thunder Bay, Toronto and Ottawa. The federal strategy is primarily a mechanism for community capacity building and for funding in urban areas to Aboriginal organizations. Responsibility for this program resides within the Office of the Federal Interlocutor and although the federal government has indicated its intention to develop a framework across all departments, a formal policy framework is not yet in place.

The UAS was allocated \$68.5 million over five years for the 13 urban centres participating in the program. The Toronto amount in 2009-10 was \$585 thousand of which \$400 thousand was allocated to a community investment Request for Proposal process. In Toronto, the federal UAS is managed by a local community/government Toronto Urban Management Committee (TUMC). Although a City of Toronto staff member attends meetings of the TUMC, the City does not have a formal arrangement with the federal government for the UAS.

The Government of Ontario has established a partnership with the federal UAS and contributes \$100 thousand annually to the UAS towards staff costs, space and capacity building activities for community members of the management committee. Ontario is involved in a wide spectrum of initiatives targeting Aboriginal communities in Toronto. The Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs is currently conceptualizing a Provincial horizontal Urban Aboriginal Framework.

C (d) Inventory of City initiatives

An essential step in the development of an Urban Aboriginal Framework is to identify the ways in which the City currently supports and works with the Aboriginal communities in Toronto. A survey was developed to map relevant City policies, services, programs and other initiatives that were current and planned, to identify trends and characteristics of City practices, to identify opportunities for collaboration among City divisions and to document lessons learned.

City Divisions were asked to identify any program, policy, community engagement, or other City practice that includes Aboriginal communities in Toronto as a target group, partner, and/or consultant. Divisions were also asked to identify practices that specify Aboriginal communities as one of many targeted communities, for example, access, equity and human rights policies, programs to increase City inclusion for Aboriginal

persons living in affordable housing; local economic development activities that included Aboriginal perspectives in its consultation process, or events that showcase Aboriginal art or culture

Survey results found that there were 30 municipal initiatives targeted to Aboriginal communities in Toronto. These initiatives covered a number of areas, ranging from funding, services, planning and consultation. The inventory also found a high occurrence of engagement activities, which demonstrates the value that the City already places on working with Aboriginal communities. However, there is wide variation in how and when engagement occurs and the degree to which partnerships evolve. The focus group discussions noted that it would be important to develop community-informed guidelines on engagement and other programs involving Aboriginal communities. The inventory also identified a gap in internal initiatives that focus on building the capacity of City staff to work appropriately with Aboriginal communities in Toronto.

D. Proposed Statement of Commitment

This Statement of Commitment will form the foundation for strong working relationships with Aboriginal communities and for the collaborative development of successful programs and policies. It will be used to develop an Action Plan to give effect to the principles outlined in the Statement of Commitment.

Throughout the process of developing this Statement of Commitment, participants have observed that Aboriginal people have historically been presented with agreements, promises, and intentions that have not materialised. This has affected the trust and hope between Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal governments. As such, this Statement of Commitment can only be effective in creating an inclusive and equitable Toronto for urban Aboriginal people if resources are allocated to achieve these commitments. Collaboration with Aboriginal communities is a key value that has been and will continue to be integral to the development of this Framework.

Through this Statement of Commitment, the City of Toronto acknowledges that Aboriginal people are the original inhabitants of Toronto and that this area holds historical significance where diverse Aboriginal nations came together to exchange goods and that it is a sacred place for cultural practices. The City of Toronto values its Aboriginal history and the meaningful contributions of Aboriginal people to the development and the prosperity of Toronto.

This Statement of Commitment will:

- recognise the unique status of Urban Aboriginal people in Toronto and their status as the original inhabitants;
- recognise that the Aboriginal population in Toronto is made up of richly diverse communities, including First Nations from across Canada, Métis, and Inuit people;

- recognise that many Aboriginal people living in Toronto are affected by historical and contemporary injustices which continue to have profound impacts on most, if not all, aspects of life;
- recognize the contributions of Aboriginal people to the success and vitality of the City;
- inform Council's decisions regarding City policies and programs relating to Urban Aboriginal Peoples of Toronto;
- provide a strategic platform for pro-active intergovernmental relations on Urban Aboriginal issues;
- inform responses from the City when issues related to urban Aboriginal people arise;
- inform all aspects of departmental policy, planning and service delivery throughout the Toronto Public Service;
- inform human resource strategies aimed at increasing the representation of Aboriginal people at all occupational levels of the Toronto Public Service.

The Statement of Commitment proposes a number of commitments which focus on listening, learning, sharing, promoting, establishing partnerships and allocating resources aimed at developing successful relationships and creating meaningful opportunities for Aboriginal people in Toronto.

In the next phase of the development of the Toronto's Urban Aboriginal Framework, the City will work with Aboriginal communities, other orders of government and other stakeholders to prepare an Action Plan to ensure practices align with the Statement of Commitment and to develop equitable opportunities for Toronto's Aboriginal community.

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 City Manager

APPENDIX A: City of Toronto Statement of Commitment to Aboriginal Communities in Toronto

Building Strong Relationships, Achieving Equitable Outcomes

The City of Toronto recognizes and respects the unique status and cultural diversity among the Aboriginal communities of Toronto. The City of Toronto continues its commitment to supporting the Aboriginal right to self-determination by working inclusively with Aboriginal communities in Toronto to achieve equitable outcomes for Aboriginal people within their communities and their day to day lives.

Recognize:

The City of Toronto recognizes the inherent rights of Aboriginal people provided by the Canadian Constitution. The City acknowledges that Aboriginal people are the original inhabitants of the land now known as the City of Toronto and that this area holds historical significance where diverse Aboriginal nations came together to exchange goods and as a sacred place for cultural practices. The City of Toronto values its Aboriginal history and the meaningful contributions of Aboriginal people to the development and the prosperity of Toronto.

The City of Toronto recognizes the rich diversity that exists within Aboriginal communities. Aboriginal people are First Nations, Métis and Inuit people. The City understands that the term Aboriginal includes diverse communities and cultures that originate from all areas across Canada as well as being indigenous to Toronto. Aboriginal people are part of the social fabric of the city and live in neighbourhoods throughout Toronto.

The City of Toronto understands that many Aboriginal people living in Toronto are affected by historical and contemporary injustices which continue to have profound impacts on most, if not all, aspects of life. The City acknowledges that reconnecting with, maintaining, and celebrating a strong sense of Aboriginal identity, through cultural expression, retention of language, spiritual practice, and/or community relations, is fundamental to the well-being of many Aboriginal communities.

The City of Toronto respects the strength and capacity of organizations that exists within Aboriginal communities in Toronto and acknowledges that this has fostered positive change for Aboriginal people living in Toronto

Listen, Learn, Share, Promote:

The City of Toronto acknowledges that an understanding of the Aboriginal history of the city is an important element in creating the foundation for a strong working relationship with Aboriginal communities and in the collaborative development of successful

programs and policies. The City of Toronto also understands that public reflection and celebration of Aboriginal cultures and life are important elements of achieving the City's vision of access, equity and human rights – a vision that seeks to achieve a City that is inclusive for all Torontonians.

Commitment:

The City commits to creating training opportunities for the Toronto Public Service to learn about the history and its current day impacts from Aboriginal Elders and other Aboriginal partners. The City also commits to working with Aboriginal communities to improve public awareness of Aboriginal life in Toronto.

The City of Toronto acknowledges that Aboriginal approaches to healing, growth, and mutual understanding are often holistic in nature, and that these approaches may differ from non-Aboriginal methods. The City understands that Aboriginal people are well served when services and programs are culturally appropriate. The City also understands that the programs and practices of Aboriginal organizations are culturally based.

Commitment:

The City commits, when working with the Aboriginal communities in Toronto, to learn about the elements of an Aboriginal holistic approach from its Aboriginal partners. The City further commits to supporting this approach in the belief that this will provide the greatest benefit to the community being served.

Partner and Engage:

The City of Toronto acknowledges that Aboriginal communities have the knowledge and experience to work with the City to develop strategies for addressing Aboriginal issues and expanding Aboriginal opportunities. The City also understands the value in initiatives that are both led and delivered by Aboriginal people.

Commitment:

The City commits to working with Aboriginal partners to explore ways to strengthen the capacity of Aboriginal organizations and associations to plan, lead and deliver initiatives for local Aboriginal communities. The City also commits to engaging Aboriginal communities in the City's decision making process, to removing barriers to civic participation and to increasing the representation and role of Aboriginal people on municipal boards and committees.

The City of Toronto values diversity and equity within the Toronto Public Service and is committed to the achievement of its Employment Equity Policy so that the workforce represents the population that it serves.

Commitment:

The City of Toronto commits to implement employment practices that ensure that opportunities for employment are accessible to Aboriginal people and increases the number of Aboriginal employees at all occupational levels.

The City of Toronto recognizes that collaborative and seamless approaches to service delivery from all orders of government, institutions and community organizations are important for Aboriginal communities.

Commitment:

The City of Toronto commits to working formally and informally with all orders of government and other municipalities, institutions and community organizations to continue exploring promising practices and opportunities for collaboration on Aboriginal initiatives and to promote the interests of Aboriginal people in Toronto, as defined by the Aboriginal communities.

TOWARDS AN ACTION PLAN

The City of Toronto will demonstrate through its actions the value it places on contributions made by Aboriginal people and its belief that a diverse, inclusive, and equitable Toronto is a strong Toronto. The City believes that this *Statement of Commitment* will result in meaningful advancement of equitable opportunities for Aboriginal people when actions are taken and resources are allocated.

Commitment:

The City of Toronto commits to the development of an action plan in partnership with Aboriginal communities in Toronto. The City of Toronto also commits to ensuring an accountability process is established in order to measure the success of the *Statement of Commitment*.