

Advancing Reconciliation, Equity and Inclusion: Re-imagining a New Future for Toronto History Museums

Date: June 20, 2022

To: Economic and Community Development Committee

From: Interim General Manager, Economic Development and Culture

Wards: All

SUMMARY

This staff report provides an overview of the implementation of a strategic vision at Toronto History Museums to advance reconciliation, equity and inclusion and counter anti-Black racism as outlined in the *Toronto History Museums Strategic Plan: Laying a New Foundation* contained in Attachment 1. The vision's goals include working towards decolonization, creating inclusive community spaces, sharing stories from multiple perspectives, providing equitable access, building sustainability, and championing the creation of a Museum of Toronto.

The report highlights a number of initiatives that have been undertaken to move Toronto History Museums' visionary strategy and goals forward, including: establishing program advisory groups made up of members from Indigenous, Black and equity-deserving communities; the Lieutenant Governor award-winning Awakenings program that explores history and meaning through the eyes of Indigenous, Black and racialized artists; making general admission to all ten Toronto History Museums free and standardizing their operating hours; digitizing the historical collections to make them more accessible; starting on a process to co-create an Indigenous Collections Management Strategy for the City of Toronto's historical collections; and launching HistoricTO walking tours to engage the public in a dialogue about local histories that intentionally contests the usual, dominant narrative.

This visionary direction seeks to breathe new life into Toronto's ten history museums, in both virtual and real space, to promote individual and collective healing in order to transform them into places that foster trust, empathy, belonging and understanding.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Interim General Manager, Economic Development and Culture recommends that:

1. City Council approve the *Toronto History Museums Strategic Plan: Laying a New Foundation* contained in Attachment 1 to this report as a framework for continuing to advance reconciliation, equity and inclusion at the City's Toronto History Museums.
2. City Council authorize the General Manager, Economic Development and Culture to negotiate and execute, on behalf of the City, programming, collaboration and licence agreements (for the use of museum space), including any amendment, renewal or extension agreements and any ancillary documents (each with a value of up to \$500,000) with other non-profit organizations or artists to undertake activities to advance the goals identified in the *Toronto History Museums Strategic Plan: Laying a New Foundation* as presented in Attachment 1, on such content, terms, and conditions deemed necessary by the General Manager, Economic Development and Culture, and in a form satisfactory to the City Solicitor.
3. City Council authorize the General Manager, Economic Development and Culture in consultation with the Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer as appropriate, to apply for, receive funds and to negotiate, enter into and execute any agreements, including any amendment, renewal or extension agreements and any ancillary documents (with a value of up to \$500,000) with the Government of Canada, Government of Ontario and/or agencies of the federal and provincial governments to support the *Toronto History Museums Strategic Plan: Laying a New Foundation* identified in Attachment 1, in a form satisfactory to the City Solicitor.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There is no immediate financial impact resulting from the adoption of the recommendations in this report.

Should there be any resources required, to implement the *Toronto History Museums Strategic Plan: Laying a New Foundation*, as outlined in Attachment 1, they will be addressed as part of the future year budget processes for City Council consideration. If any successful funding is received, Economic Development and Culture will report to City Council through the variance reporting or annual budget process in future years at the first opportunity to amend the operating and/or capital budgets, as required.

The Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer has reviewed this report and agrees with the information as presented in the Financial Impact Section.

RECONCILIATION AND EQUITY IMPACT

The *Toronto History Museums Strategic Plan: Laying a New Foundation* is "grounded in equity, anti-racism and anti-oppression" (p. 3). Starting as a new work plan in 2018 that evolved into a visionary strategy in 2020, the innovative programs and services that have been inspired through this renewal process have positively impacted Indigenous, Black, and racialized communities' access to City spaces, training and employment, and civic engagement. The plan has also resulted in City Council's approval through the 2022 budget process of the removal of general admission fees at all ten museums, thereby improving and providing equitable access to underserved, marginalised and low-income residents.

In explicitly identifying the responsibility to "engage in acts of reconciliation through meaningful dialogue, partnerships, and consultation with Toronto's rich and diverse Indigenous Communities," (p. 6) Toronto History Museums is acknowledging its role in ensuring that there are spaces and places for Indigenous Peoples to connect with their own histories and cultures. Such commitment aligns with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action numbers 67-70 related to museums and archives including "Aboriginal peoples' inalienable right to know the truth about what happened and why, with regard to human rights violations committed against them in the residential schools."¹ As a result of developing and implementing this new visionary strategy, Indigenous Peoples' access to City information, services and spaces are being positively impacted, truth and reconciliation is being advanced, and trust and understanding is being built among communities and residents.

One of the programs that was inspired by this new vision – Awakenings – has provided opportunities for over 105 Indigenous, Black and racialized individuals, with these artists telling stories at the intersection of history, culture, art and resilience that have never been told to a wide audience in City spaces before. The program has had and continues to have a positive impact on these specific artists, and has also strengthened the sense of identity and belonging of residents from Toronto's diverse communities that can now see themselves reflected in stories and art in City spaces.

Toronto History Museums' new vision contributes to a Toronto that aspires to be a city that welcomes and promotes diversity in the broadest sense of the term. It is a commitment towards proactively listening to one another in order to advance reconciliation and equity, ensuring that barriers are removed and that all the diverse voices that make Toronto a thriving and culturally-rich city are reflected in Toronto History Museums' programming and services.

¹ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action (2015), p. 8, <https://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/97ba-Truth-and-Reconciliation-Commission-Calls-to-Action.pdf>.

DECISION HISTORY

At its meeting on May 11, 2022, City Council approved the Toronto Action Plan to Confront Anti-Black Racism – Year Three Update, including priorities for Economic Development and Culture to "Recognize, reimagine and re-invest in neighbourhoods and public spaces to create safe and accessible public and virtual spaces for diverse Black communities. Celebrate and preserve Black culture, assets and heritage to strengthen Black representation and leadership in local decision making, and to foster deeper connections between Black families, children, residents and the places where they live."

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2022.EC29.5>

At its meeting on April 6, 2022, City Council approved the 2022-2032 Reconciliation Action Plan, including the action that the Economic Development and Culture Division will "work with Indigenous communities to apply an Indigenous truth-telling and storytelling lens at City-owned museums."

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2022.EX31.1>

At its meeting on February 17, 2022, City Council approved discontinuing user fees for general admission at all Toronto History Museums in order to remove barriers to public access and allow for more equitable access.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2022.EX30.2>

At its meeting on December 16, 17 and 18, 2020, City Council adopted the report from the City of Toronto's Economic and Culture Recovery Advisory Group entitled "Building Back Stronger: Report of the Economic and Culture Recovery Advisory Group" that had as one of its four focus areas Anti-Racism and Inclusion, advocating for "specific interventions to make meaningful structural change and ensure that Black, Indigenous, and equity-deserving groups have better access to the city's economic and cultural benefits and opportunities."

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2020.EC18.15>

COMMENTS

The philosopher George Santayana once wrote "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." This sentiment reminds us of the relevance history has to our current day. However, the question remains, whose past are we remembering? The aphorism "history is written by the victors" suggests that what is taken for historical truth is only one side of the story, and most often, the side preferred by the dominant class.

What does this mean for Toronto History Museums? The City of Toronto, through the Museums and Heritage Services Section of the Economic Development and Culture (EDC) Division, operates ten museums: Fort York National Historic Site, Colborne Lodge, Montgomery's Inn, Scarborough Museum, Gibson House, Zion School House, Spadina House, Mackenzie House, Todmorden Mills and Market Gallery. These museums are by their very nature colonial, built to embody and celebrate the values of

the white, male, heterosexual land-owning class of the day. Their physical presence – their bricks and mortar – stand as physical reminders of Canada's colonial history.

While colonialism is embedded in the very structure of these historic houses and cannot ever be fully eradicated, what can be changed is the stories that are told about these buildings and the people of their time. In other words, while it may not be possible to fully decolonize Toronto's ten historical museums, it is certainly possible to move towards decolonization by bringing to the surface their submerged and repressed histories.² In 2018 Toronto History Museums proposed to advance this idea by developing a bold and transformative mission, vision, and narrative. Over two years a new work plan was developed, culminating in the creation of the *Toronto History Museums Strategy: Laying a New Foundation* in 2020. The strategy is clear in its intent:

"This Strategic Plan is grounded in equity, anti-racism and anti-oppression. It strives to advance broad municipal and divisional priorities including the City of Toronto's strategic plan (2019), the Economic Development and Culture Division's strategy (2018-2022) and equity plan (2019), as well as the multi-year plans of the Indigenous Affairs Office and the Confronting Anti-Black Racism Unit.... All ten Toronto History Museums must re-imagine a new future for the historic house museums. We must re-evaluate the stories we share and the way they are shared. We must create space for communities to share knowledge. It is imperative that we champion a new path forward – one which is authentically inclusive to all" (p. 3).

The strategy identifies six goals:

- Decolonize Toronto History Museums to advance recommendations of Indigenous voices in Canada
- Create community spaces that are inclusive to all
- Share relevant stories from multiple perspectives to support an equitable society
- Revitalize the visitor experience to ensure equitable access to services and a sustainable financial future
- Build capacity to promote Sustainable Development Goals, which help all communities thrive
- Champion the creation of a Museum of Toronto that serves as a hub to the existing Toronto History Museums and celebrates Toronto's cultural heritage

The work to advance these goals started before the pandemic, with, for example, Toronto History Museums' collaboration with the Social Development, Finance and Administration (SDFA) Division to promote Black Food Sovereignty as well as helping to promote community safety through SDFA's SafeTO: A Community Safety and Well-

² The terms "colonization" and "decolonization" are used here as defined by the City of Toronto's 2022-2032 Reconciliation Action Plan: "Colonization – The establishment, exploitation, maintenance, acquisition and expansion of colonies in one territory by people from another territory. It is a set of unequal relationships between the colonial power and the colony, and between the colonists and the Indigenous population. Decolonization – Decolonization is the process of removing colonial elements from ways of thinking and the systems and structures within which we live and work, including but not limited to imperialism, white supremacy, patriarchy, paternalism and human centrism," p. 6, <https://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/8d83-City-of-TO-Reconciliation-Action-Plan-for-web.pdf>.

Being Plan; and working with the Seniors Services and Long-Term Care Division to develop programming for delivery in the City's long-term care homes.

Toronto History Museums has also collaborated with a number of external groups and organizations in moving this work forward, for example, with Soulepper Theatre to present "A Revolution of Love," a series of live performances and in-person art installations that showcase new, custom works created by eight artists from the Awakenings Artist Mentorship Program. It is through collaborations such as these, with both internal and external partners, that this vision for Toronto History Museums can best achieve its goals.

This work moved forward despite the disruption of the pandemic in early 2020. In fact, coinciding with the development of this new direction for the City's museums, it became clear that COVID-19 was having a disproportionately negative impact on Indigenous, Black, Racialized, 2SLGBTQ+ and other equity-deserving groups. This made the vision for Toronto History Museums even more relevant.

This new direction for Toronto History Museums is in alignment with how the Canadian Museums Association (CMA) is approaching the redefinition of museums in Canada. The theme for the CMA National Conference that took place on April 26-27, 2022 was "Dismantling Foundations to Build a Better Tomorrow":

"Since their creation, museums have been tied to the colonial project and its impulse to showcase the spoils of violence and subjugation.

Even as they served to extol the powerful of the day, museums were created to cement and disseminate colonial attitudes and values rooted in the suffering and exploitation of nations, communities, and people.

That was then, but so too, it is now.

Many museums are now questioning this paradigm and are looking critically at these legacies to become spaces less harmful for those living outside the colonial canon....

If we are to be true to a vision of a sector that actively advances justice, equity, inclusion and diversity, there is no option for us but to name the legacies of colonialism, racism, misogyny, homophobia, transphobia and the other forms of oppression that continue to be showcased in too many of our institutions." ³

By grounding Toronto History Museums in the ethical principles of reconciliation, anti-oppression, anti-racism, equity and inclusion, in both real and virtual space, the colonial histories of these spaces are turned on their heads. In this way, these new narratives help to move us all closer together in empathy and understanding.

³ CMA National Conference: Dismantling Foundations to Build a Better Tomorrow, Canadian Museums Association Press Release, Ottawa, March 7, 2022, <https://museums.ca/site/aboutthecma/newsandannouncements/march82022>.

In addition, this new strategic vision is well-aligned with and supports the federal government's recent announcement of Bill C-23, which if passed, is intended "to give Indigenous peoples a stronger voice and strengthen the protection and conservation of historic places in Canada":

*"The proposed legislation creates three new positions on the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada (HSMBC) for First Nations, Métis and Inuit representatives, and improves integration of Indigenous history, heritage values, and memory practices into Canada's national heritage and history. This step is an important part of the Government of Canada's response to Call to Action 79 of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, which calls for the development of a reconciliation framework for Canadian heritage and commemoration."*⁴

Although both Fort York and Spadina House are national historic sites, they are not funded by the federal government and along with the other eight City historic sites do not fall under this new proposed federal legislation. However, this federal initiative to address reconciliation with regards to heritage and commemoration complements the Toronto History Museums' visionary strategic plan and can help inform the City's work moving forward. In this way, both the City of Toronto and the federal government can work together to mutually reinforce their reconciliation efforts with Indigenous Peoples.

Achievements to Date

Below are highlights of a few of the accomplishments achieved to date through this bold new vision for Toronto History Museums at the City of Toronto.

Programming Advisory Groups

In May 2020 Toronto History Museums set up two programming advisory groups for a two-year term to help guide the transformation of its programming.

The Indigenous Programming Advisory Group – Aanji bimaadiziwin – operating in accordance with the seven sacred teachings of Wisdom, Love, Respect, Bravery, Honesty, Humility and Truth,⁵ has provided guidance for active engagement with Indigenous communities to identify gaps and challenges in Toronto History Museums' programming.

The IDEA Programming Advisory Group made up of members from a number of different equity-deserving groups has provided guidance to developing Toronto History Museums' programming using an explicitly anti-oppression lens. The group's work has been intentionally grounded in respect and truth based on principles that include

⁴ "New Government of Canada legislation to give Indigenous peoples a stronger voice and strengthen the protection and conservation of historic places in Canada," Government of Canada Press Release, June 7, 2022, <https://www.canada.ca/en/parks-canada/news/2022/06/new-government-of-canada-legislation-to-give-indigenous-peoples-a-stronger-voice-and-strengthen-the-protection-and-conservation-of-historic-places-.html>.

⁵ See the *City of Toronto's 2022-2032 Reconciliation Action Plan*, p. 14, <https://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/8d83-City-of-TO-Reconciliation-Action-Plan-for-web.pdf>.

confronting racism, embracing transformative approaches, and developing respectful, engaged, trusting and collaborative relationships.

Awakenings

Winner of the 2021 Lieutenant Governor's Ontario Heritage Award for Community Leadership, the City of Toronto's Awakenings program features art projects created by Indigenous, Black and artists of colour. The Awakenings program provides a pathway to deepen understanding and healing, to recovery and to rebuild. Some of the programming under Awakenings include:

- *HerStory*: HerStory pays tribute to some of the incredible women who have made or are continuing to make important contributions to Toronto's history and story. With their talents, skills, determination and perseverance these inspiring women have woven together a more equitable future for us all.
<https://www.toronto.ca/explore-enjoy/history-art-culture/museums/herstory/>
- *Superbloom: An Emancipation Story*: This short film is set in the haunted sites of Toronto's slave-owning past. A young boy meets a Moko Jumbie ancestor who guides him in a dream-like journey inspired by Carnival rituals. He finds crystalline seeds that grow into potent visions of Black pride, love and anguish. Directed by Hyghly Alleyne and produced by Eric Black, including a collaboration with acclaimed artists, designer Michael Lee Poy and sculptor-architect Philip Beesley.
<https://www.toronto.ca/explore-enjoy/history-art-culture/museums/superbloom-an-emancipation-story/>
- *Behind the Curtain*: For the first time, Roger Mooking is sharing his personal truth in Behind the Curtain. In conversation with award-winning alternative hip-hop recording artist and broadcaster Shad, and a prominent producer and multidisciplinary artist Byron Kent Wong, Roger reflects on the effects of racism on mental health and shares untold stories of his experiences growing up in the Prairies and working in the American South. The conversation includes how food, art and music helped him on his journey. Behind the Curtain is filmed at Montgomery's Inn.
<https://www.toronto.ca/explore-enjoy/history-art-culture/museums/behind-the-curtain/>
- *We Were Always Here*: World-renowned director Julien Christian Lutz pka Director X mentored Toronto-based emerging and mid-career filmmakers – all Indigenous, Black and people of colour, presenting short films that aimed to disrupt, discover and display colonial narratives from the past within the present day world. Some of the films are part documentary, some are more experimental; all are based in anti-oppression and offer a look inside a world never seen before.
<https://www.toronto.ca/explore-enjoy/history-art-culture/museums/we-were-always-here/>

More information about Awakenings can be found at <https://www.toronto.ca/explore-enjoy/history-art-culture/museums/>.

Free General Admission and Harmonization of Hours

In order to remove barriers to access, Toronto History Museum programming staff recommended expanding free general admission to museums for residents of underserved areas including Neighbourhood Improvement Areas, Indigenous and equity-deserving communities to ensure all people have the opportunity to participate in cultural heritage.

This initial recommendation was expanded to make general admission permanently free to all, which gained Toronto City Council approval through the 2022 budget process. As of May 1, 2022, to coincide with the proclamation of Museums month, all ten of the City's historical museums now operate with free general admission.

To ensure consistent access across all ten Toronto History Museums, as of May 1, 2022 all sites now are open Wednesday to Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., with each museum offering extended hours one evening per week. This harmonization also supports streamlined operations and allows for more accurate budget planning with regards to staffing.

Digitized Collections

Toronto History Museums Fine Art and Artifact Collection features over one million archaeological specimens, 150,000 artifacts and 3,000 works of art that reflect the 11,000-year span of human occupation in the Toronto region. In the past, most of the collection was not accessible to the public with the exception of a limited number of objects on display at the museum sites. As part of Toronto History Museum's commitment to increased access, much the collection has been digitized and placed online. The searchable database of objects is available at:

https://toronto.minisisinc.com/scripts/mwimain.dll?logon&application=COLLECTIONS&language=144&file=%5BCOT_OPAC%5Dhome.html.

The collection can be searched by keyword, browsed by historic site, or accessed through curated topics such as Stay and Play; High Park; Cooking at Home; Health; and the Art Collection.

Indigenous Collections Management Strategy

As part of the City of Toronto's commitments to reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples, Toronto History Museums is embarking on the co-development of an Indigenous Collections Management Strategy with Indigenous partners. This approach, started over two years ago and currently under development, will guide how City of Toronto staff collect, care for, make accessible, and provide for the spiritual needs of Indigenous Ancestral objects for which the City is a steward.

Based on initial engagement with members of the Grand Medicine Midewiwin Society, a number of Indigenous Ancestral objects have been identified for further research and action. The best disposition for each object will be determined by the results of staff research and the guidance provided by Indigenous partners, including the options of joint management, stewardship or repatriation.

City of Toronto staff are working with Indigenous communities to reach consensus on the interpretation and disposition of Indigenous objects in the City's collection. Should consensus not be achievable, in order to move towards decolonizing the relationship between the City and Indigenous Peoples, the City will look to Indigenous partners to make the final decisions that impact their Ancestral objects.

HistoricTO

Launched in July 2020 at the height of the pandemic, HistoricTO offers a new cultural experience to connect Toronto's communities by providing inclusive and free access to local history, heritage and land-based learnings at Toronto History Museums.

HistoricTO walking tours, a time-ticketed, guided neighbourhood walking tour experience, offer visitors the opportunity to engage in discussions and explore Toronto through diverse perspectives. Themes include: colonization and the evolution of land use over time, the impact of urban development and industrialization, settlement patterns and immigration, Indigenous, Black, 2SLGBTQ+ and women's history.

Free self-guided neighbourhood walking tours have also been developed that provide a view of Toronto through diverse perspectives, including: Scarborough: Diverse Histories for a Diverse Community (Bendale); Landscape, Industry and Change in the Don Valley (Broadview North); Willowdale: Land and Memory (Willowdale West); Perseverance and Pushback in 19th Century Toronto (Church-Yonge Corridor); The Streets Around Spadina: A Changing Neighbourhood History Revealed (Casa Loma); Fort York and the Defenders of Upper Canada (Niagara); The Lots and Landscapes of High Park (High Park-Swansea); and Montgomery's Inn: At the Intersection of Routes, Waterways and Fields (Kingsway South).

Next Steps: Moving History Forward by Uncovering the Untold Past

Toronto History Museums has only started this process of the reshaping of Toronto's diverse and inclusive history. Overcoming centuries of colonial history in order to create new meaning through the telling of histories that were suppressed, repressed and pushed underground takes time and care. It also means working collaboratively with other living history sites in Toronto and across Canada to support one another and share best practices as we all struggle against the colonial past.

The recommendations in this report provide the Economic Development and Culture Division with the authority to continue to advance the bold vision outlined in the *Toronto History Museums Strategic Plan: Laying a New Foundation*; the capacity to develop more and deeper collaborations with non-profit organizations and artists; and the ability to apply for and accept funding from the federal and provincial governments – all with the aim of advancing reconciliation, equity and inclusion.

Toronto History Museums will continue to establish, build and maintain strong and lasting relationships with other funders, including the federal government which provided much-needed funding for the re-opening of Toronto History Museum sites and the development of new programming like Awakenings.

Toronto History Museums will take the time and care to ensure all residents of Toronto know that they belong, that they are valued, and that they are seen and heard. By re-examining the past from the vantage point offered by the different perspectives of the many people who have called this place home, Toronto History Museums can help build a path to a better future for us all.

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SIGNATURE

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ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: Toronto History Museums Strategic Plan: Laying a New Foundation