

## **Ookwemin Minising and Biidaasige Park: Naming the New Island and Park in the Port Lands**

**Date:** November 1, 2024

**To:** Executive Committee

**From:** Interim Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning and the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation

**Wards:** Toronto-Danforth - Ward 14

### **SUMMARY**

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This report responds to [MM5.3 – Place Names in the Port Lands](#) and [EX13.5 - New Island, New Beginnings: Furthering Reconciliation and an Indigenous Cultural Framework for the Port Lands](#).

Over the last year, City staff, in collaboration with MinoKamik Collective and LURA Consulting, facilitated an Indigenous community engagement process to discover, reflect on, and determine Indigenous names for the new island in the Port Lands. The proposed names were lifted up by an Indigenous Advisory Circle (the Circle), comprised of Elders, Knowledge Keepers, language speakers, youth and community members. The process was rooted in Indigenous traditions, teachings and cultural protocols, involving ceremonies, site walks, and deep discussions. The Indigenous Advisory Circle met seven times between April and October 2024. In addition, broader Indigenous communities were engaged at community events, in a survey and in other ways.

Circle discussions centered on the area's history as former marshland, the cultural significance of the land and water, and long-term environmental restoration and stewardship, with a focus on water and native plants. The historical erasure of Indigenous languages and significance of language revitalization initiatives was also emphasized. The collaborative engagement process is detailed in Attachment 3.

As acknowledged at the April 9, 2024 [Executive Committee](#) meeting, the decision to hand over the power to name this place to Indigenous communities was both a symbolic and concrete step in turning words into actions that contribute to truth, justice, and reconciliation. The process itself is as meaningful as the names chosen. This process demonstrates ways of shifting power and priorities with respect for Indigenous worldviews, ways of knowing, cultural protocols, ceremonies, self-determination and leadership.

This report recommends naming the new island in the Port Lands **Ookwemin Minising**, (pronounced Oh-kway-min Min-nih-sing), meaning “place of the black cherry trees” in Anishinaabemowin/Ojibwemowin. As outlined in Attachment 3, this name honours the natural history of the land, recognizes a vision of environmental restoration, and highlights the future care of Indigenous plant communities. Local Elders recalled the waterfront’s original marshlands near the mouth of the Don River and the trees that grew throughout the waterfront area. The connections between past, present and future resonated with the Circle, with efforts to restore and revitalize both Indigenous names and plants. The name also aligns with other historical Ojibwe place names on Lake Ontario, including Adoobigok (Etobicoke) meaning “place of the alders.”

The area the Circle named Ookwemin Minising was previously referred to by several names through many years of planning, design and construction, including the Lower Don Lands, River Precinct, Cousins Quay, and Villiers Island. In November 2024, the “north plug removal”, a key milestone for the Port Lands Flood Protection project, will connect the Don River with the river valley and complete the transition of the landmass into an Island surrounded by water, from planning concept to physical reality. Ookwemin Minising will therefore be the formal name for this newly formed island, coinciding with its emergence as a significant ecological and cultural landmark on the Toronto waterfront.

Additionally, this report recommends naming the new park surrounding the Island **Biidaasige Park**, (pronounced Bee-daw-sih-geh), meaning “sunlight shining toward us” in Anishinaabemowin. As outlined in Attachment 3, this name relates to the hopeful light of a new day, shining on waterway restoration and reconciliation and acknowledges the relationship between the earth, water, sun, and moon as relatives and teachers. The name recognizes water awareness as central to the Port Lands Flood Protection project and creation of the renaturalized Don River, valley and park. The name honours the Indigenous water walker movement, Water Walkers including Josephine Mandamin, and the Indigenous communities who have helped highlight the significance of water as essential to life. The name connects with, and ties together, design elements throughout the island, including the bridges and the flow of the river from east to west, in line with the direction of the sunlight’s daily path.

In addition to the two names brought forward in this report, a new name for a portion of Cherry Street that was not realigned, between Commissioners Street and the Keating Channel, was determined by the Circle and will be discussed with landowners and then recommended to the Toronto East York Community Council in December 2024 as part of a staff report on road openings related to the Port Lands Flood Protection project.

Other names for the area will be recommended as needed through future related engagement processes. Other than the portion of Cherry Street referenced above, City staff are not recommending that any other existing civic assets be renamed at this time. Villiers Sankey, a former City surveyor, will continue to be commemorated through Villiers Street, an existing street that will be prominent on the new Island.

Through [EX13.5 - New Island, New Beginnings: Furthering Reconciliation and an Indigenous Cultural Framework for the Port Lands](#), City staff were also directed to report back on an Indigenous cultural framework for waterfront revitalization in the Port Lands.

In 2025, staff will present a report on the many ongoing initiatives related to the Reconciliation Action Plan and Indigenous cultural revitalization on the waterfront.

While Indigenous place naming is a significant part of ongoing efforts to advance Indigenous cultural revitalization on the waterfront, it is but a small step in a long journey. There are many ongoing initiatives and future opportunities for advancing Reconciliation Action Plan commitments in a forward-looking framework that involves First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities throughout the process.

Ongoing initiatives that the City and partnering agencies, including Waterfront Toronto and CreateTO, are collaborating on with Indigenous communities span from ecology, native plantings, and land/water stewardship to Indigenous art, design, and interpretive signage to language revitalization through place naming. First Nations rights holders, Elders and Knowledge Keepers, Indigenous artists and designers, urban Indigenous youth and community organizations and others are involved. The many communities involved are collaborating to ensure Ookwemin Minising and surrounding precincts are places with meaning and connection to Indigenous histories, cultures, values, and ways of knowing that center connection to the land, water, plants and animals.

Future opportunities will take shape alongside the evolution of the future mixed-use communities in Ookwemin Minising and the broader Port Lands. These opportunities can include affordable housing, economic development, land and water stewardship, cultural programming and placekeeping through public realm design. These will be discussed with Indigenous communities and begin to be outlined in a framework, with the vision for this new island, Ookwemin Minising, to be a place where Indigenous histories, worldviews, cultures, and ways of life hold a respected, celebrated, prominent and distinctive place on the waterfront.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

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The Interim Chief Planner and Executive Director of City Planning and General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation recommend that:

1. City Council designate the new island in the Port Lands, shown in the map in Attachment 1, as “Ookwemin Minising” recognizing this as the island’s permanent name as it becomes a distinct landform.
2. City Council adopt the name “Biidaasige Park” for the new park in the Port Lands, shown in the map in Attachment 2.

## **FINANCIAL IMPACT**

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The City Planning Division confirms that there are no additional financial implications resulting from the recommendations included in this report in the current budget year or in future years. Signage is already planned for new park openings.

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

## **RECONCILIATION IMPACT**

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This initiative advances several actions of the Reconciliation Action Plan, including:

- Actions #5 & #6: Improving relationship-building with Indigenous communities;
- Action #15: Supporting Indigenous placekeeping;
- Action #17: Supporting the revitalization of Indigenous languages;
- Action #16: Celebrating Indigenous arts and culture; and
- Action #2: Enhancing Indigenous education and awareness among the public.

Over the last century, there has been an erasure of First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples' history, culture and visible presence on this land. This naming process is a crucial step toward addressing this historical erasure by advancing the commitments of the City of Toronto's Reconciliation Action Plan. Specifically, it aligns with the Reconciliation Action Plans actions to "elevate Indigenous languages in placemaking and placekeeping initiatives," and "work with language speakers and Knowledge Carriers to ensure that Indigenous language is given priority in the naming and renaming of City streets, parks and other City assets."

This initiative builds on feedback from the City's community engagement with First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities during 2022-2023, guided by the 2022 renewed vision for the Next Phase of Waterfront Revitalization, which centered truth, justice, and reconciliation as one of the core priorities. The naming of Ookwemin Minising and Biidaasige Park are symbolic and significant parts of a broader set of initiatives that support Indigenous cultural revitalization in the Port Lands. It serves as a foundational step in establishing the new island as a "beacon of Indigeneity" on the waterfront.

It also builds off Waterfront Toronto's relationship-building with the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation and other Indigenous communities throughout the Port Lands Flood Protection project over the last five years.

While the names that came out of this process are a celebratory step toward supporting Indigenous language revitalization and placekeeping, the process itself is equally, if not more, meaningful. Progress on advancing truth, justice and reconciliation will be made by establishing new ways of working, leading and stepping back. How we do what we do matters. This process demonstrates ways of shifting power and priorities with respect for Indigenous worldviews, cultural protocols, ceremonies, self-determination and leadership. It also brings non-Indigenous people along the path and process of reconciliation by encouraging deeper understandings of Indigenous ways of knowing and being, revealing the rich history, cultures, and languages this land is rooted in.

## **DECISION HISTORY**

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On April 18, 2024, City Council directed City staff recommend a permanent name for the Island and propose a framework for reconciliation projects. City Council's decision is available here: <https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2024.EX13.5>

On March 29, 2023, City Council adopted MM5.3 Place Names in the Port Lands directing City staff to consult with Indigenous communities and propose name for Villiers Island, public parks, and streets. City Council's decision is available here: <https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2023.MM5.3>

In June 2024, City Council adopted PH13.2 Villiers Island Precinct - City-initiated Official Plan and Zoning By-law Amendment to increase affordable housing and directing City staff to align the Precinct Plan with the objectives of the City's Reconciliation Action Plan. City Council's decision is available here: <https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2024.PH13.2>

In 2022, City Council adopted a renewed vision and priorities for waterfront revitalization with a focus on reconciliation. City Council's decision is available here: <https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2022.EX34.10>

On June 13, 2022, the Aboriginal Affairs Advisory Committee recommended the City "dedicate time, space, and money with the goal of Returning land to Indigenous governments, communities, collectives, and organizations and that City Council ensure the Reconciliation Action Plan applies to agencies, boards and commissions, including Waterfront Toronto and CreateTO and should be a core consideration in redevelopment of all City-owned properties." The Committee decision and presentation are available here: <http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2022.AA18.2>

On December 5, 2017, City Council endorsed the Villiers Island Precinct Plan by adopting PG24.6 - Port Lands Planning Initiatives - Final Report. The Precinct Plan provided direction to highlight Indigenous culture by integrating Indigenous history and contemporary activities into its design and by naming public spaces using Indigenous names. City Council's decision and the Precinct Plan are available here: <https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2017.PG24.6>

## COMMENTS

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City Council has progressively emphasized the importance of First Nations, Inuit and Métis community engagement, placekeeping and commemoration on the waterfront, beginning with the adoption of the Port Lands Planning Framework and Villiers Island Precinct Plan in 2017. The Precinct Plan recognized this area as former marshland and a significant historical site for Indigenous communities. The plan emphasized that this history should be showcased through landscape design, public art and interpretation to increase awareness of the history and ongoing presence of Indigenous communities and cultures. The plan included direction to continue engaging with Indigenous communities on the naming of spaces as well as public realm, detailed design, and native plantings. The built form principles in the 2017 precinct plan and 2024 amendment seek to "maintain and celebrate the built, cultural and natural heritage of the island and surrounding Port Lands." These directions were further strengthened by

City Council's 2022 renewed vision for waterfront revitalization, which placed Truth, Justice, and Reconciliation as one of four priorities for waterfront initiatives moving forward.

In March 2023, City Council directed City staff to engage with Indigenous communities in naming of the new Island, its park, and streets. City staff collaborated with a lead Elder/Cultural Advisor and engagement consultant on an engagement process, resulting in the recommendations in this report. City Council's decisions in June 2024, including aligning the 2024 update to the Villiers Island Precinct Plan with the City's Reconciliation Action Plan, have further reinforced this commitment, ensuring that Indigenous voices and priorities are integral to shaping the long-term vision for the new Island and Port Lands.

### **Why Naming Matters: Connection between Indigenous Languages and the Land**

Since time immemorial, the mouth of the river now known as the Don River was one of the largest freshwater marshes on Lake Ontario; a fertile wetland, fishing ground, and gathering place for Indigenous people. The area underwent dramatic changes in the late 19th century to create an industrial port. These modifications – resulting from colonialism, land reclamation, and lake-filling – severely altered the mouth of the Don River and surrounding habitat.

This damage to the land is now being recognized and repaired. The Port Lands Flood Protection project has brought back part of the lower Don River to a more natural state while increasing flood protection for neighbouring land and creating new spaces for future neighbourhoods and housing. The design of the new parkland resulting from the Port Lands Flood Protection project has prioritized discovery and restoration of the area's Indigenous ecology with Indigenous placekeeping elements throughout the park and native plantings, supported by MinoKamik Collective as a key Indigenous design advisor. The reconnection between the renaturalized river mouth and the Don River results in a new island that needs a name. Given the strong connection to place held by First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities, cultures and languages, handing the power of naming to those communities enables this story of change, industrialization and now, renaturalization, to be reflected on and incorporated into the place name for this area.

In honouring the United Nations International Decade of Indigenous Languages (2022-2032), this naming initiative represents a unique moment to draw attention to the critical situation of many Indigenous languages and to support their preservation, revitalization and promotion, as called for by First Nations, Inuit, Métis and urban Indigenous communities in the City's Reconciliation Action Plan and through discussions about the Next Phase of Waterfront Revitalization. This process delivers on the Reconciliation Action Plan call and commitment to "elevate Indigenous languages in placemaking and placekeeping initiatives" and "work with language speakers and Knowledge Carriers to ensure that Indigenous language is given priority in the naming and renaming of City streets, parks and other City assets."

The impacts of colonialism, residential schools and assimilationist and racist policies systematically undermined First Nations, Inuit and Métis cultures across Canada and

severed connections through which culture was taught and celebrated, contributing to a loss of language and resulting dialects being highly endangered in some regions.

Anishinaabemowin/Ojibwemowin, and other local Indigenous languages, are oral phonetic languages, with variability in both written spelling and pronunciation according to region, dialects and personal expression.

In the naming process, great effort has been taken to build consensus on names and spellings for writing and signage purposes. Regional language interpretations and flexibility for spelling and pronunciation variations are also important for Indigenous community accessibility and acknowledgement. Some spellings changed through the process as Circle consensus was reached on the final names.

## **Why Process Matters: Engagement Process**

### *Indigenous Community Engagement*

Over the last year, City staff collaborated with MinoKamik Collective and LURA on an Indigenous community engagement process to discover, reflect on, and determine Indigenous place names for the new Island in the Port Lands, the park, and local streets. The collaborative process involved an Indigenous Advisory Circle of Elders, Knowledge Keepers, language speakers, youth, and community members, as well as broader engagement with First Nations and Métis communities. The Circle met seven times from April to October. Participants invited to the Circle included community members from across Anishinabek, Haudenosaunee, Métis and urban Indigenous communities.

Together, they walked the land and discussed the area's history, cultural values, and stories to uncover, identify, and lift up names for the island and the park. Through this process, a vision and guiding principles were developed to inform the chosen names. The process itself is as meaningful as the names chosen. This process demonstrates ways of shifting power and priorities with respect for Indigenous worldviews, ways of knowing, cultural protocols, ceremonies, self-determination and leadership. It was led by the guiding principle and understanding that the land can be a teacher and guide us in priority-setting and decision-making.

At key points during this process, broader Indigenous communities were also provided opportunities to contribute their perspectives and/or learn about the initiative through an online survey, public events, meetings, a public awareness video and website. More details about the process and communities involved can be found in Attachment 3.

### *Akinomaagewin - Guiding Principles & Philosophy*

The naming initiative was led by the Guiding Philosophy of *Akinomaagewin*, meaning “The earth as teacher, leading the way.” This guiding principle asks how can the land act as a teacher throughout this process? The philosophy of *Akinomaagewin* [the earth as teacher] emerged during the first Circle gathering through ceremony with the offering of tobacco in the search to find a name for the island.

Through the first few Circle discussions, a set of guiding principles were developed and established by the Indigenous Advisory Circle and shared in a survey with broader Indigenous communities for input. These principles included:

1. **Reclaiming, Restoring and Remembering** - Consider whether the naming process is about reclaiming, restoring or remembering. The name should reflect the spirit of the land, water and this process;
2. **Spirit of the Land as Teacher** - Ensure the name connects to the land by reflecting the spirit of the place and its significance to the community;
3. **Shared Creation Stories, Concepts and Responsibilities** - Acknowledge shared creation stories and the responsibilities that come with them, ensuring these are reflected in the name; and
4. **Place for Learning, Storytelling and Stewardship** - Recognize the island as a new place where land stewards can gather and teach about land stewardship.

### *Broader Public & Stakeholder Awareness*

As an Indigenous-led initiative and process that respects, honours and centers Indigenous languages and ways of knowing and being, the engagement process centered Indigenous communities, as outlined above. However, outreach to key stakeholders and broader public awareness was incorporated into the process.

Local landowners were invited to a meeting to learn about the process and the guiding principles for naming in the area.

City staff met with the family of Villiers Sankey, who emphasized the importance of maintaining the name of the existing Villiers Street, which remains unchanged and will be prominent as the area builds out.

An educational video aimed at public awareness was developed in collaboration with an Indigenous Advisory Circle member and Port Lands Flood Protection videographer to share the process with the public, provide information about the Indigenous Advisory Circle and the guiding principles and philosophy of Akinomaagewin.

### **Commemorative Framework**

This engagement and naming process aligns with the City of Toronto's [Commemorative Framework](#), incorporating the following principles:

1. Be informed by historical research, traditional knowledge and community insights;
2. Be supported by communities through meaningful engagement;
3. Honour Indigenous ways of knowing and being;
4. Prioritize commemorations significant to Indigenous Peoples, Black communities and equity-deserving groups;
5. Connect to Toronto, Ontario or Canada's histories and cultures; and
6. Share knowledge and stories behind commemorations.



The process outlined in Attachment 3 demonstrates that the Indigenous-led naming process was deeply rooted in honouring Indigenous ways of knowing and being, respecting traditional knowledge, oral histories, language spellings and community insights, prioritizing areas and place names significant to Indigenous Peoples, connecting to Indigenous histories and cultures present on this land since time immemorial but lacking in representation, and sharing knowledge and stories about this land and all our connections to it.

Discussions with First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities regarding place naming, appropriate approaches rooted in culture and ceremony, and historically and culturally significant sites to different communities are ongoing and input is welcome through various initiatives led by the Indigenous Affairs Office, Parks, Forestry & Recreation and City Planning, including through the Indigenous Engagement Heritage Project.

### **Naming the New Island - Ookwemin Minising**

As outlined in the Engagement Summary in Attachment 3, this fall, the Circle came to consensus and lifted up a name for the island and the surrounding park.

For the island, the Circle lifted up the name **Ookwemin Minising**, (pronounced Oh-kway-min Min-nih-sing), meaning “place of the black cherry trees” in Anishinaabemowin/Ojibwemowin.

Name: Ookwemin Minising

Pronunciation guide: Oh-kway-min Min-nih-sing

Interpretation/translation: Place of the black cherry trees

As discussed by the Indigenous Advisory Circle and further elaborated in Attachment 3:

“This name is an acknowledgement of the natural history of the land, a grounded vision of the restoration and future care of Indigenous plants. Local Ojibwe Elders recalled the waterfront’s original marsh lands near the mouth of the Don River, known as *Waasayishkodenayosh* (sometimes seen as *Wonscotonach*), had an abundance of *Ookwemin* [black cherry], and that these trees grew throughout the waterfront area.

*Ookwemin Minising* [place of the black cherry trees] was lifted up as a name for the island. *Ookwemin* [black cherry] aligns with other historical Ojibwe place names on Lake Ontario that are rooted in the land, such as *Adoobigok* [the place of the alders] at the mouth of the Humber River. These original names connected to the land are being acknowledged and renewed.

What resonated around the Circle with this name are the connections between the past and the future through the revitalization of Indigenous names and plants. This aligns with efforts to restore native plants and ecosystems, including black cherry trees, which have recently been planted as part of the Don River mouth renaturalization projects by Waterfront Toronto, and there is potential to plant more.

This Indigenous cherry tree is an important species in Southern Ontario for Indigenous cultural heritage and is coveted by all for its beautiful flowers, fruit, and wood. This species is known to grow in soils at the edge of the north shores of Lake Ontario as well as in a wide range of forests across Eastern North America. It is predicted to do well in the Greater Toronto Area with future climate change as a resilient species advised to be included in native planting plans through the climate resilience-focused work to renaturalize the mouth of the Don River.”

## **Naming the New Park – Biidaasige Park**

For the park, the Circle lifted up the name **Biidaasige** (pronounced Bee-daw-sih-geh), meaning “sunlight shining toward us” in Anishinaabemowin/Ojibwemowin.

Name: Biidaasige

Pronunciation guide: Bee-daw-sih-geh

Interpretation/translation: Sunlight shining toward us

As discussed by the Indigenous Advisory Circle and further elaborated in Attachment 3:

“This name relates to the Port Lands Flood Protection project and *Akinomaagewin* process being centered in water awareness and water conservation, and to the hopeful light of a new day shining on waterway restoration and reconciliation. The relationship between the earth, sun, and moon as relatives and teachers are integral to the Indigenous worldview of interconnectedness.

*Biidaasige* speaks to important design elements of the area, the renaturalized river and surrounding parkland, as designed throughout the Port Lands Flood Protection project. The position of the park with the new mouth of the Don River running alongside, water entering on the east side of the island and flowing to the west, means that this is the geographic position where the dawn’s light will first illuminate the water and shine onto the area. The ideas of light shining and shimmering on the water, celestial movements, and strength of the sun is also reflected in the area’s bridge designs as they were positioned and painted orange, yellow and red to correspond with dawn, midday, and sunset.

Circle discussions on this name turned many times to the importance of honouring water, Water Walkers, and the Indigenous community who have helped highlight water as essential to life. The Water Walker movement was promoted by Anishinaabe Elder Josephine Mandamin (*Biidaasige-ba*), of Wikwemikong First Nation, who had a vision to rise at dawn and to walk thousands of kilometres around Great Lakes and Canadian waterways to raise awareness for water conservation. The Water Walker movement continues to build strength across Turtle Island today.

*Biidaasige* directs our attention to the interconnectedness of the sun, land and waters, and to our universal responsibility to healing relationships to our environment and with each other.”

## **Next Steps**

The naming of Ookwemin Minising and Biidaasige Park are significant steps towards reclaiming, restoring and revitalizing Indigenous cultures, languages and heritage on the waterfront in Toronto. The lifting, gifting, respect and celebration of Indigenous place names builds trust and shared responsibility with the City of Toronto and Indigenous communities to thoughtfully care for these new places. This initiative marks the beginning of a broader effort to strengthen relationships with First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities and support cultural revitalization in alignment with the City’s Reconciliation Action Plan. The waterfront, and this area in particular, holds significant opportunities for reconciliation action given the cultural significance of water and nearby land to Indigenous communities. The planning, development and programming of future mixed-use neighbourhoods, park and public realm on Ookwemin Minising hold opportunities to advance affordable housing, economic development, stewardship and placekeeping and cultural revitalization needs and interests heard through waterfront-related engagement processes and outlined in the Reconciliation Action Plan.

### *Implementation of Names*

Ookwemin Minising as the name for the island and Biidaasige Park will be integrated into City mapping, signage, and public communications, as the new park is opened and the Island is developed, ensuring their visibility and recognition. Maps of the areas are included in Attachments 1 and 2.

### *Future Naming*

A portion of Cherry Street that was not realigned will also receive a new name that was determined by the Circle. This will be shared and discussed with local landowners. This is necessary to resolve the interim naming of New Cherry Street, to be renamed Cherry Street. This name will go to the Toronto East York Community Council in December 2024 as part of a staff report on road openings related to the Port Lands Flood Protection project.

Other names for the area will be recommended as needed through future related engagement processes. Timelines will be related to next steps that involve design and implementation of all the enabling local infrastructure to deliver a connected system of streets, public squares and promenades needed to support development.

Other than the portion of Cherry Street referenced above, City staff are not recommending that any other existing civic assets be renamed at this time. Villiers Sankey, a former City surveyor, will continue to be commemorated on the Island through Villiers Street.

### *Indigenous-Led Design and Cultural Programming in Biidaasige Park*

In 2025, Biidaasige Park will open to the public, incorporating Indigenous art and design features, interpretive signage, and cultural programming. These elements will be central to the unveiling of this revitalized landscape, making Indigenous culture a visible and celebrated presence on the waterfront. City Divisions, including Parks, Forestry & Recreation and Economic Development & Culture, working with partners, will implement design elements that reflect the Indigenous identity of the new park. This will include:

- Interpretive Signage: Informational signage across the island and park will share Indigenous teachings about the land and water;
- Public Art and Installations: Indigenous-led public art initiatives, as outlined in the Public Art Master Plan, will honor the connections between land, water, and Indigenous worldviews; and
- Cultural Events: Indigenous cultural programming, including ceremonies, storytelling, and seasonal events, will be planned as part of the parks' official openings and ongoing cultural activation.

### *Education and Outreach*

A public education campaign will be launched to raise awareness of the new names and their significance. This includes public videos sharing the process and name pronunciations, meanings and significance, publicized through the City of Toronto website and social media channels. These videos were created in collaboration between an Indigenous Advisory Circle member and filmmaker and the photographer/videographer involved in the Port Lands Flood Protection project over the last five years. More information can be found in Attachment 3.

### *Cultural Revitalization Framework for the Port Lands*

Through [EX13.5 - New Island, New Beginnings: Furthering Reconciliation and an Indigenous Cultural Framework for the Port Lands](#), City staff were also directed to report back on an Indigenous cultural framework for waterfront revitalization in the Port Lands. In 2025, staff will present a comprehensive report that provides a bigger picture view of the various ongoing initiatives, future opportunities and next steps related to advancing the Reconciliation Action Plan and Indigenous cultural revitalization in the Port Lands.

Indigenous place naming is one significant part of ongoing efforts to advance truth, justice and reconciliation, however it is a small step in a long journey. There are interconnected initiatives that the City and partners, including Waterfront Toronto and CreateTO, are collaborating on with First Nations, Inuit, Métis and urban Indigenous communities. This includes First Nations rights holders, Elders and Knowledge Keepers, Indigenous artists and designers, urban Indigenous youth and community organizations and others, to have the broader impact of rooting Ojibweminsing and areas near the renaturalized river in Indigenous languages, history, arts and culture, placekeeping and ways of knowing. Initiatives include Indigenous-led art and design features, language revitalization through place naming, Indigenous placekeeping and storytelling through interpretive signage, native plantings and land and water

stewardship, all underpinned by a commitment to deepening relationships with First Nations, Inuit, Métis and urban Indigenous communities.

A review of lessons learned throughout this place naming initiative and the collaborative engagement process rooted in cultural protocols and ceremony and different ways of working will be shared across City Divisions to reflect on best practices, barriers and opportunities to build on this process as an example for others. This will include input and important considerations shared by the Elder and engagement consultants. Advice already heard includes considerations for creating additional positions within City structures for Indigenous community engagement and cultural advisor roles, understanding that this work requires long-term commitments to relationship-building and sustained funding. This builds on commitments in the Reconciliation Action Plan related to supporting Indigenous relationship-building, economic development, employment and recruitment and retention.

There are many opportunities for advancing these and related Reconciliation Action Plan commitments in a forward-looking framework that involves First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities throughout the process. The involvement and leadership of these communities is critical in shaping future engagement processes and neighbourhoods on the waterfront. While significant relationships have been built throughout flood protection, plantings, park design and naming processes, many others need to be restored, repaired and rebuilt. These processes are ongoing, with room for improvement, ongoing learning and unlearning and humility.

## **Conclusion**

The naming of Ookwemin Minising and Biidaasige Park marks a significant step in reclaiming, restoring, revitalization and celebrating Indigenous cultures, languages and heritage within the ongoing revitalization of the Port Lands and waterfront. These names not only honor the cultural and ecological history and significance of the area, but also represent the City's broader commitment to truth, justice and reconciliation through Indigenous placekeeping and cultural revitalization, and most importantly, relationship-building with Indigenous communities. By making space for, funding and prioritizing First Nations, Inuit and Métis voices and ways of knowing into the design, programming, and stewardship of these spaces on the waterfront, a precedent is being set in Toronto for ways of approaching development, placekeeping and stewardship that are inclusive, respectful, and rooted in Indigenous knowledge and traditions. How we do what we do matters. This process serves as an example of how to shift power and priorities in tangible ways, demonstrating action on commitments to truth, justice and reconciliation.

## **CONTACT**

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## **SIGNATURE**

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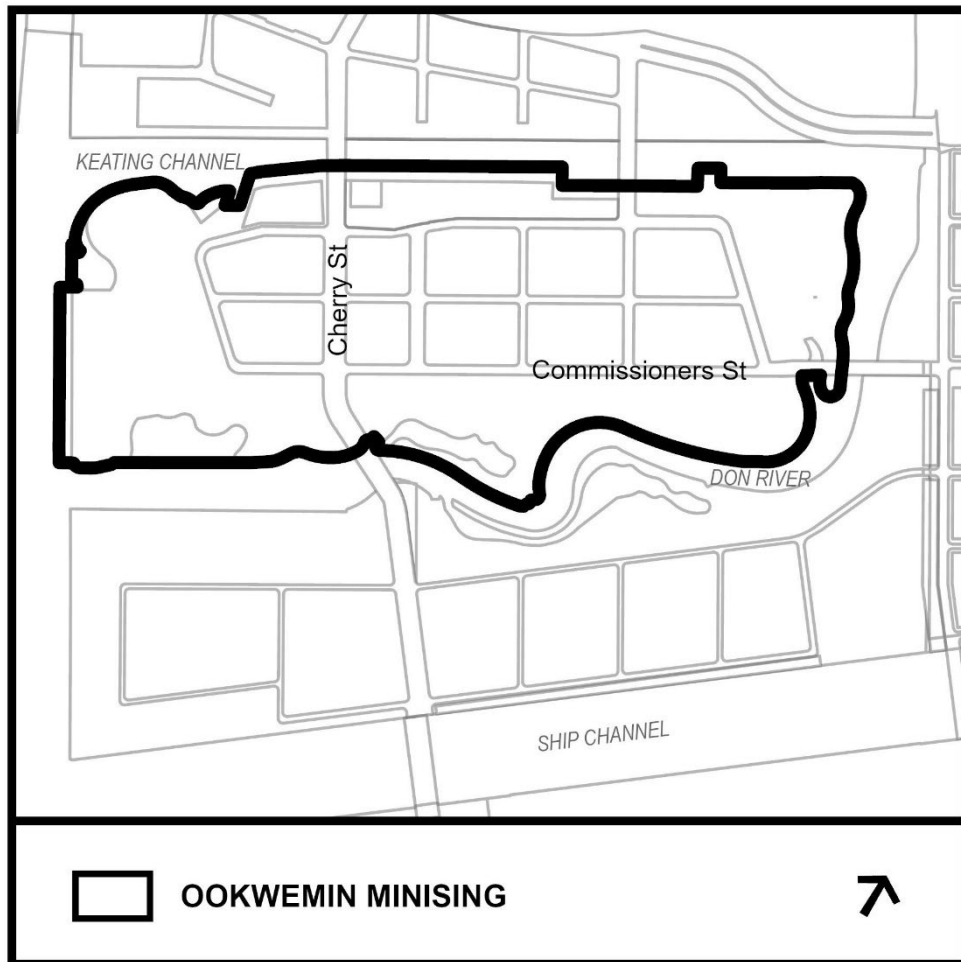
Howie Dayton  
General Manager  
Parks, Forestry & Recreation

## **ATTACHMENTS**

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Attachment 1 - Ookwemin Minising Map  
Attachment 2 - Biidaasige Park Map  
Attachment 3 - Akinomaagewin - Port Lands Place Naming Initiative Engagement  
Summary Report

## Attachment 1 - Ookwemin Minising Map



## Attachment 2 - Biidaasige Park Map

