

Waterfront Port Lands Indigenous Place Naming Initiative



Akinomaagewin

‘The Earth As Teacher, Leading The Way’

Report prepared by LURA Consulting and MinoKamik Collective
in collaboration with the City of Toronto:
Indigenous Affairs Office, City Manager’s Office
Waterfront Secretariat, City Planning
Parks, Forestry & Recreation
October 2024

Acknowledgements

The City of Toronto acknowledges that we are on the traditional territory of many nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples and is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. The City also acknowledges that Toronto is covered by Treaty 13 signed with the Mississaugas of the Credit, and the Williams Treaties signed with multiple Mississaugas and Chippewa bands.

The Indigenous Advisory Circle involved in the place naming process emphasized that a land (or earth) acknowledgement should consider the land, water, plant, and animal relatives before people.

These comments encouraged reflections on the significance of that order of acknowledgements and how it could inform subsequent discussions.

We would like to sincerely thank the Elders, Knowledge Keepers, language speakers, youth, and cultural leaders who participated in the Indigenous Advisory Circle. Your contributions of time, knowledge, and expertise were essential in guiding these discussions and shaping the direction of this work.

We appreciate the open and thoughtful dialogue shared during the seven circles and your insights and perspectives. Thank you for your commitment and involvement in this important process.

We would also like to thank the Native Canadian Centre of Toronto for hosting a Circle meeting and its role supporting innovative approaches to community engagement.

Chi-Miigwech, Nya:weh, Marsii!

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Introduction

As the renaturalization of the mouth of the Don River (Port Lands Flood Protection project) nears its expected completion by the end of 2024, a new island is being formed in the Port Lands, and this new island needs a name. City of Toronto staff collaborated with [LURA](#) and [MinoKamik Collective](#) on an Indigenous community engagement process to discover, reflect on, and recommend Indigenous place names for “Villiers Island,” the parkland and connecting streets. This initiative is an inclusive process that will inform further Indigenous community engagement on initiatives that support Indigenous cultural revitalization and reconciliation in the Port Lands.

This process has a vital land and water focus. In 2022, Grandmother Pauline Shirt, Toronto-based Elder and Water Protector, worked with the City of Toronto and the Waterfront Secretariat team to help set an early joint vision. Through community engagement and a water ceremony connected to the [Next Phase of Waterfront Revitalization](#) initiative, a vision was set forth for this work, with water recognized as a connection for us all.

Niiganii Gchi Gamig [Leading Lake], also known as Lake Ontario, continues to sustain and cultivate all life within the depths of her water and along her shores; as this is her promise to Creation, for she is the nurturer of life; the Water. For thousands of years, Indigenous Nations have gathered along her shores, netted and fished from her waters, building homes and communities, living in a reciprocal way, always being mindful, respectful to the lake and her inhabitants.

Keeping this in mind as we move forward together in the protection and sustainability of the lake and all that call her home, it's important to reach back to the original relationship between Indigenous Peoples and the lake; our worldview is clear and focused as we see all life as part of a Sacred Hoop that honours all of Creation; every living thing plays a vital role in life; no less than or greater than, there is balance.

As we come together in this work for the waterfront of Lake Ontario, we need to uplift and support her in her work as the nurturer of all life, for she needs our help now so future generations can live with good health and harmony within the Sacred Hoop of Life.

– Late Grandmother Pauline Shirt (Plains Cree Elder)

The 39.6-hectare island will be surrounded by unique parkland, green space, wetlands, and a new river valley, which will open to the public in 2025. The 19.4 hectares of developable land on the new island will become available for transformation into a leading example of a contemporary, mixed-use community (currently referred to as the “Villiers Island Precinct”) with expected residents as early as 2031.

This report and appendices include words in several local Indigenous languages as *Akinomaagewin*. Circle participants shared their thoughts on place names. *Anishinaabemowin/Ojibwemowin* [Ojibwe/Ojibway] is spoken in various dialects by Anishinaabe First Nations communities, including Mississaugas and Chippewas.

Hodinöhsö:ni' [Haudenosaunee/Iroquois] Six Nations languages here include dialects of local *Onöndowa'ga:'* [Seneca/Onondaga] and *Kanien'kéha* [Mohawk]. *Michif* is the most common of several languages and dialects spoken by Métis communities. *Wendat* [Huron-Wendat] was

historically spoken in the GTA until the 19th century by Wendat communities and is undergoing language revitalization by the Huron-Wendat Band Council. In many cases, Indigenous languages are being actively revitalized through community education efforts, but regional dialects of all are acutely endangered.

Following our commitment to support the revitalization of Indigenous languages, Indigenous words are written first in italics, followed by translation in brackets. Languages are specified in superscript using the following:

Language Legend¹

^A = *Anishinaabemowin/Ojibwe*

^K = *Kanyen'kéha/Mohawk*

^M = *Michif/Métis*

^O = *Onöndowa'ga'/Seneca*

^W = *Wendat/Wyandot*

Background

From time immemorial, people have prospered in this area, as told in stories like Philip Cote's "Ice-Runners" or "*Oh-kwa-ming-i-nini-wug*", or evidenced in the 12,000-year-old footprints that were found in the blue clay under Toronto's Harbour in 1908 by a tunneling crew. Further evidence can be found in ancient trails along the foot of the retreating glaciers as referenced by the Indigenous name of *Gete-Onigaming*^A [the old portage], now known as Davenport Road, which stretched between the Humber and Don rivers running along the northern shoreline of glacial Lake Iroquois. As the glaciers retreated, it is thought that the animals made the first trails that led them to water, and the people followed.

The geologic history of this area, which gives us landmarks like the Scarborough Bluffs and the Toronto Islands, called *Mnising*^A [on the island], bears witness to the Indigenous history and culture. The waterways and the moderate climate of the Great Lakes made it a perfect place to fish, hunt, grow food, and gather medicines and seeds for horticultural development.

By the time of contact from visitors of European Nations, this land, now referred to as Canada, was home to millions of First Nations people and Inuit living in hundreds of nations and communities. Villages and place names like *Adoopekog*^A [place of the alders], the origin of Etobicoke, *Ganatsekwyagon*^O [among the birches], at the mouth of the Rouge River, and *Teiaiaagon*^O [crosses the stream], located near the mouth of the Humber River are examples of settlement near the trails, rivers, and streams so important to the Indigenous people who lived here. Early

¹ Anishinaabemowin/Ojibwemowin [and other local Indigenous languages] are oral phonetic languages, only recently partially recorded, with variability according to dialects and personal expression. Residential schools and assimilationist and racist policies systematically undermined First Nations, Inuit and Metis cultures across Canada and severed connections through which culture was taught and celebrated, contributing to a loss of language. Some spellings changed through the process as Circle consensus was reached on the final names and spelling for written documents/signage. Visual representation (images) and celebration of flexibility in oral language variation and dialects is recommended to accompany presentation of Indigenous place names as a reflection of vibrant regional language traditions and expression.

Europeans knew that the hundreds of Indigenous Peoples in North America already possessed all the elements of nationhood that were well established by European settlers: territory, governing structures, legal systems, and historical continuity with their territories.

There are many early treaties, covenants, and agreements, in the form of Wampum belts - which are made of beads fashioned from seashells by various Indigenous groups in Canada and the United States - about how to travel through and share this territory and its resources in a respectful way that would leave it abundant and pristine for generations to come. These agreements highlight the need to maintain an intimate relationship with the environment. The relationship is one of reciprocity and respect where the land sustains and provides for the people, and the people sustain and manage the land through ceremony and continuously thank the environment for all it provides. In Woodsy Park, the discovery of the ancient Moatfield Ossuary (burial site) in 1997, led to the Wyandot name, *Ethenonnhawahstihnen*² [where they had a good, beautiful life] as a way to honour that history and heritage.

The name of the city itself derives from the Haudenosaunee word *Tkaronto*^k [the place where there are trees standing in the water], which is thought to refer to fishing weirs that have been carbon-dated to over 4,000 years old. The Petun, the Wendat, the Haudenosaunee, the Anishinaabeg have all made their homes in this area and have many names for the weirs found at many places like The Narrows between Lake Simcoe and Lake Couchiching. Indigenous People fished, hunted, harvested, and farmed using tools and technology they invented to fit their unique environments. As peoples, they developed their own languages, cultures, traditions, laws, and governments. All these Indigenous languages hold the knowledge of how to live on the land and surrounding waters, knowledge that is passed down by the Elders and Knowledge Keepers from generation to generation through experiential learning, teachings, songs, and stories. These stories teach how to live in the right relations with all of creation, express gratitude to the Earth for nourishing us, and live in reciprocity with nature, giving back for everything you take.

The [City of Toronto's Reconciliation Action Plan \(RAP\) 2022-2032](#) is dedicated to “all First Nations, Inuit and Métis who have lived and persevered on these lands despite consistent colonial efforts to perpetuate forced assimilation and cultural genocide.” The RAP also honours “those Indigenous warriors, defenders of land and culture, and leaders who have worked tirelessly for generations in this place, so that we may now continue their efforts in the spirit of reconciliation.” Elder Dr. Duke Redbird (Saugeen First Nation) [said](#), “Since 1805, from the Don River to the Humber River, there's been no evidence that Indigenous people ever lived on the waterfront of Toronto. Citizens of Toronto, the city fathers, purchased the land on the waterfront. And once they did that, all the Indigenous people were moved off to other reserves, and the history of the waterfront, from an Indigenous lens, was pretty well forgotten, and there was no evidence that we ever were here.”²

Over the last century, there has been an erasure and exclusion of Indigenous Peoples' history and visible presence on this land due to settlement and industrialization of the Toronto Waterfront. This

² The *Wigwam Chi-Chemung* is a project led by Elder Redbird that is an opportunity for Torontonians and visitors to learn about the Indigenous culture and history of Toronto. The Port Lands Indigenous Place Naming initiative, along with broader Indigenous art, design, and cultural revitalization initiatives related to this island and surrounding area, begin to address the gap and minimization of Indigenous presence, history and culture in this area. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=764BLe1T3Ys>

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 City's intentions 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."

Aligning with the Reconciliation Action Plan

This initiative is centred on meaningfully advancing the City of Toronto's Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP), adopted by City Council in 2022. Developed over three years of input from First Nations, Inuit, and Métis community members, organizations, Elders, Knowledge Carriers, youth, and Indigenous employees and allies in the Toronto Public Service, the RAP commits to actions to restore truth, to right relations and share power and to advance justice and make financial reparations.

The *Akinomaagewin* initiative is centred on the following actions:

- Action #2: Enhance Indigenous education and awareness among the public;
- Actions #5: Improve relationships with Treaty & Territorial partners;
- Actions #6: Improve relations with Indigenous organizations;
- Action #15: Support Indigenous placekeeping;
- Action #16: Celebrate Indigenous arts and culture;
- Action #17: Support the revitalization of Indigenous languages;
- Action #21: Decolonize honoraria practices.

This initiative builds on feedback from the City's community engagement with First Nations, Inuit, Métis, and urban Indigenous communities during 2022-2023. It was also guided by the 2022 renewed vision for the Next Phase of Waterfront Revitalization, which centered on "truth, justice, and reconciliation" as one of the core priorities.

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.

Indigenous languages are tied directly to our relationship to the land; therefore, the teaching of the land, *Akinomaagewin*, will lead the Circle and the naming process. We are reminded that names give us a responsibility, and we must be mindful to walk with responsibility for our names.

In April 2024, ([EX13.5](#)) Executive Committee and City Council directed the Waterfront Secretariat and Indigenous Affairs Office to further engage with First Nations, Inuit, Métis, and urban Indigenous communities and report back on a permanent name for 'Villiers Island' as well as a framework for reconciliation projects that support Indigenous cultural revitalization in the Port Lands. This built off of the Council decision in March 2023 ([MM5.3](#)) that introduced the direction to engage with Indigenous communities on a "proposed name for 'Villiers Island' and an approach to naming civic assets in the 'Villiers Island Precinct,' including public parks and streets." This work will reflect on the past and focus on the future to continue collaborating and deepening Indigenous-centered community engagement.

Akinomaagewin Approach

This naming initiative is led by the guiding philosophy of *Akinomaagewin* ^A [the earth as our Teacher, leading the way], which asks, ‘how can the land act as a Teacher throughout this process?’ The *Akinomaagewin* naming process focused on the importance of respect for life-giving waters.

The Elder-led search for a name for the emerging island began in ceremony with the offering of *asemaa* ^A [tobacco] and sharing of the language, acknowledging the ancestors and the four directions teachings of seeing, relating, knowing, and doing. This unique process included Indigenous Elders, Knowledge Keepers, language specialists, community members, and youth who came together in person and online with the express intention of moving forward in naming in a thoughtful, kind, and inclusive way.

The philosophy of *Akinomaagewin* [the earth as Teacher] emerged during the first circle gathering through ceremony with the offering of tobacco in our collective search to find a name for the island. The teaching for *Akinomaagewin* was lifted up by Elder Shelley Charles and Jerry Fontaine, former Chief of Sagkeeng First Nation and consultant at the City of Toronto’s Indigenous Affairs Office (IAO).

Elder Shelley Charles teaches us that place naming is about lifting the language of the land into our everyday experience. Indigenous languages are tied directly to our relationship with the land, and therefore, the teachings of the land, *Akinomaagewin* led the Indigenous Advisory Circle and the naming process. We are reminded that names give us responsibility, and we must be mindful to walk with responsibility for our names. As such, this process was guided by Indigenous values, teachings, and principles, including the Seven Generations Principle and Seven Grandfathers teachings.

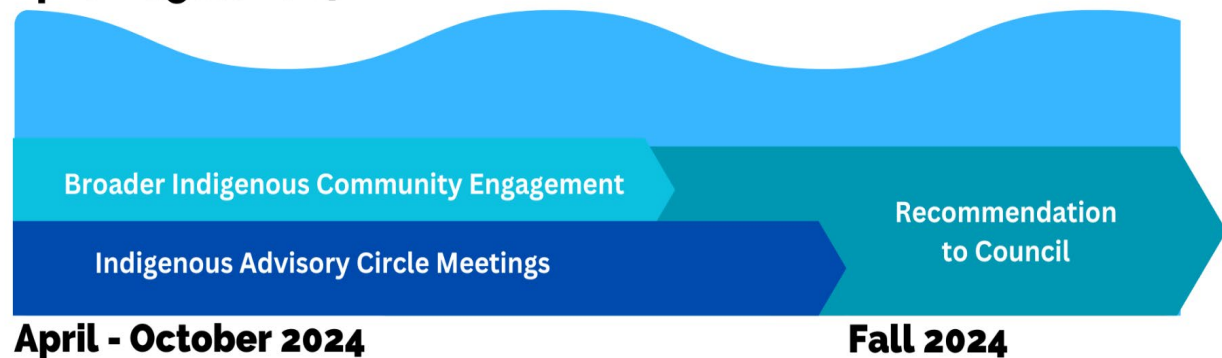
Beyond an Indigenous name for the island, there is a vision to root these parklands and future neighbourhoods in Indigenous placekeeping, ensuring that waterfront revitalization leads to places where First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples, worldviews, cultures, and ways of life hold a respected, celebrated, prominent, and distinctive place on Toronto’s waterfront. As the area takes shape over the next decade, many opportunities exist to advance the Reconciliation Action Plan, including Indigenous language revitalization, arts and culture, placekeeping, land and water stewardship, affordable housing, economic development, and most importantly, values and relationship-building.

An Indigenous Advisory Circle, consisting of Elders, Knowledge Keepers, language speakers, and community members, met seven times over the spring and summer of 2024. Together, they walked the land and discussed the area's history, cultural values, and stories to uncover/identify and recommend a name for the island, parkland, and street(s). This collaborative effort developed a vision and guiding principles to inform the selected name(s). At key points during this process, broader Indigenous participants were also provided opportunities to contribute their perspectives through a public event and digital survey. The process was iterative: the pop-up community engagements and online survey ran concurrent to the *Akinomaagewin* Naming Circle meetings, and name suggestions were discussed in the Circle as they were put forward by the community and by Circle participants.

Place names selected were the top choices to name the island and the park by Circle consensus votes. To fully affirm each chosen name, the Circle, in ceremony, stood up, and all spoke the name in the Four Directions.

Timeline

April- August 2024



Name for the Emerging Island

Name: *Ookwemin Minising*^A

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

Interpretation/translation: Place of the black cherry trees

Name Meaning & Significance:

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 marshlands near the mouth of the Don River, known as *Waasayishkodenayosh*

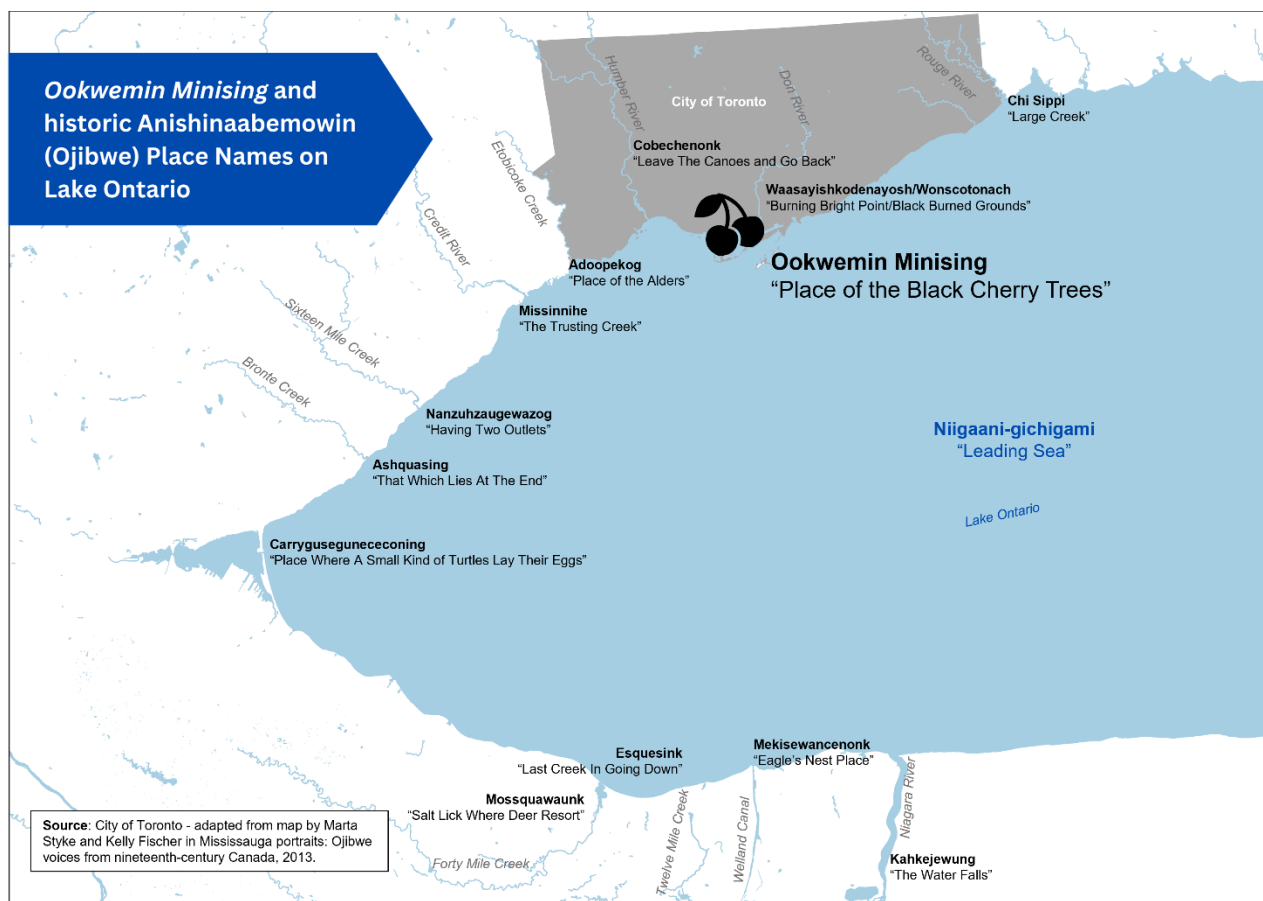
^A(sometimes seen as *Wonscotonach*^A)³, had an abundance of *Ookwemin*^A [black cherry], and that these trees grew throughout the waterfront area.

...it was remembered that along that shoreline near the Don River the black cherry grew... consider naming this place for that black cherry, Ookwemin. It naturally grows along those shorelines... -Elder Jeff Monague, Circle 5, August 20, 2024

Ookwemin Minising^A [place of the black cherry trees] was lifted up as a name for the island.

Ookwemin^A [black cherry] aligns with other historical Ojibwe place names on Lake Ontario that are rooted in the land, such as *Adoobigok*^A [the place of the alders] at the mouth of the Humber River. These original names connected to the land are being acknowledged and renewed.

³ "Wonscotonach" is a spelling often seen when referring to the Don River and surrounding area, however, throughout this process some Circle members suggested this is likely an anglicized spelling of an original Anishinaabemowin word that could be spelled "Waasayishkodenayosh, with various translations meaning "burning bright point" or "black burned grounds." [Revitalizing Indigenous stories and culture at Waasayishkodenayosh and the Port Lands | Waterfront Toronto \(waterfronttoronto.ca\)](https://www.waterfronttoronto.ca/revitalizing-indigenous-stories-and-culture-at-waasayishkodenayosh-and-the-port-lands)



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. These trees have recently been planted as part of the Don River Mouth and parks revitalization projects by Waterfront Toronto, and there is potential to plant more.

...I never got to see really big trees up where I live. There is a lot of logging so all the trees are young. All the big trees have been cut down all around Ontario... When they grow up this will be a place where the trees provide shade and will take care of us. This reminds me of Shelley's teaching of *Adoobigok* in Etobicoke and this can be a really nice honouring of the trees in this place. It is a nice way to understand the natural growth of what was here before, and is symbolic of restoration efforts... - Sage Petahtegoose, Atikameksheng Anishnawbek First Nation, Circle 6, Sept. 5, 2024

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 wood⁴. 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, and is predicted to do well in the Greater Toronto Area with future climate change⁵.

⁴ Marquis et al., 1990

⁵ Prasad et al., 2020

...the history and language of the land is still within the living memory of the people...” - Elder Shelley Charles, Chippewas of Georgina Island First Nation, Circle 6, Sept. 5, 2024

Our collective task is to consider pre-history and settlement with a distinct focus on the land as Teacher: the language is written on the land and the name *Ookwemin Minising* is a recognition of the past, present, and hope for the future of this place

Name for the Park

Name: *Biidaasige*^A

Pronunciation guide: Bee-daw-sih-geh

Interpretation/translation: Sunlight shining toward us

Name Meaning & Significance:

This name relates to the Port Lands Flood Protection Project (PLFP) and *Akinomaagewin* process being centred 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 PLFP. 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 communities who have helped bring light to the significance of 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 the 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.

This is a beautiful name for this park and where the water meets the park and the sun, and begets growth and new being. The water meets the marsh here and will be cleaner running through the park. This is a perfect name for the park. It is a woman's name but it isn't a name for one person, per se. - Luanne Cunningham, Lac Ste. Anne Métis, Circle 7, Oct. 3, 2024

Indigenous Advisory Circle

Approach

Elders, Knowledge Keepers, language speakers, youth and cultural leaders from diverse First Nations, Inuit, Métis, and urban Indigenous communities were invited to participate in the Indigenous Advisory Circle, led by MinoKamik and LURA. This included Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee, and Métis participants from across many nations, including the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation; Williams Treaty First Nations, including The Mississaugas of Curve Lake, Alderville, Hiawatha, and Scugog Island; Chippewas of Lake Simcoe; Beausoleil, Georgina Island, and Rama; Six Nations of the Grand River; and the Métis Nation of Ontario. Advisory members were invited to participate in the circle through grassroots community outreach based on diverse networks and considerations of ceremonial, cultural, and language knowledge.

Seven sharing circles were held, each providing a space for open dialogue and building on the insights from the previous discussions. Through these circles, participants shared stories, insights, and aspirations for the island, highlighting the community's collective well-being and the importance of valuing each voice. Circle participants received honoraria for their participation, cultural knowledge, and expertise, which aligns with commitments made in the City of Toronto's Reconciliation Action Plan.

Circle Participant Biographies

The following is a list of advisory circle participants and their biographies:

Shelley Charles is an Ojibwe/Anishinaabe Elder, Chippewas of Georgina Island First Nation and Indigenous Education Specialist at York Region District School Board & Cultural Advisor at First Nations Technical Institute, School of Aviation, and Lead Indigenous Advisor for MinoKamik Collective. She was among the first cohort to receive a Masters Level degree in Indigenous Philosophy from Seven Generations Education Institute (SGEI), Fort Frances. Shelley developed a Four Directional cultural framework for community visioning and engagement. Shelley has collaborated on designing the first Indigenous Medicine Garden at the Humber Arboretum and the McMichael Gallery in Kleinburg. Shelley is an Indigenous Lead for several ongoing projects at Waterfront Toronto.

Circle 1
Coming
Together

Circle 2
Setting a
Shared Vision
and Guiding
Philosophy

Circle 3
Establishing
Guiding
Principles

Circle 4
Connecting
with the Land
and Water

Circle 5
Emerging
Ideas

Circle 6
Coming to
Consensus and
Lifting Up the
Island Name

Circle 7
Coming to
Consensus
and Lifting Up
the Park
Name

Jerry Fontaine is an Ojibwe-Anishinaabe scholar and politician (former Chief of Sagkeeng First Nation). His career spans many decades, including as a representative on the Assembly of First Nations, teaching & advising at several Universities, and drafting of Indigenous community constitutional declarations. He has authored numerous books and publications on reclamation of Indigenous cultural practices, including *Our Hearts Are as One Fire: An Ojibway-Anishinabe Vision for the Future* (2020), and *Di-bayn-di-zi-win* (To Own Ourselves): Embodying Ojibway-Anishinabe Ways (2022).

Fred Martin is Mi'kmaq with membership to the Qalipu First Nations of the Port aux Port Peninsula, Newfoundland, and Labrador on his Father's side and Ojibway from M'Chigeeng First Nations of Manitoulin Island, Ontario on his Mother's side. His current role at the City of Toronto, as Senior Project Manager (Waterfront) with the Indigenous Affairs Office (IAO)

Niigaunii Conroy is an enthusiastic and thoughtful youth-in-training member of MinoKamik Collective. He is a member of Wasauksing First Nation and a young Anishinaabe person looking to work within and connect to the Indigenous community in Toronto. Niigaunii loves sports, particularly basketball, and is working towards an education in teaching and youth counseling through *Kapapamahchakwew* [TDSB's Wandering Spirit School].

Luanne Cunningham is a proud descendant of the historic Métis community of Lac Ste Anne in central Alberta, has a deeply personal connection to her heritage. Her upbringing, surrounded by strong matriarchs, instilled a deep sense of pride and a commitment to equip her better to support the Métis community here in Ontario. She is a member of the Métis Nation of Ontario (MNO) and currently sits on the Métis Nation of Ontario Women's Council as the Region 8 Women's Representative. She has played significant roles in charitable and political endeavours and has an extensive healthcare background.

Tuesday Johnson-MacDonald is a member of the Mohawk Nation, Six Nations of the Grand River, and the founder and president of TAP Resources, a successful Indigenous-led event management firm. She mentors Indigenous women entrepreneurs, providing education and training in personal wellness and business management to fight Indigenous poverty, is newly elected to the Board of Destination Toronto, and is past President of the Canadian Society of Professional Event Planners.

Clayton S. King is a Potawatomi Anishinabek artist, writer, storyteller, historian, Beausoleil First Nation (Chimnissing). In addition to his Fine Art practice, he has served the Beausoleil First Nation as a Trail Coordinator, Treaty & Historical Researcher, Elected Band Councillor, and Heritage & Cultural Coordinator.

Bryan Loucks (Wassayshikung) is a Teacher, Hiawatha First Nation, Bkejwanong Territory. He teaches in the First Nations Studies Program at Western University including subjects such as Leadership, Community Education, and Indigenous Legal Traditions.

Jeff Monague is an Elder & Knowledge Keeper in his community of Beausoleil First Nation (Chimnissing), as well as a musician and Teacher. He is the former Chief of the Beausoleil FN and also former Director of Treaty Research of the Anishinabek (Union of Ontario Indians), and a Canadian Forces Veteran. He has taught Ojibwe language at the Simcoe County District School

Board and Georgian College, and has recently played the role of Grand Moff Tarkin as a voice actor in the newly-released Anishinaabemowin version of Star Wars (*Anangong Miigaading*): A New Hope.

Spring Rayne Noganosh is an Anishinaabe youth from Nipissing First Nation and a member of *Waubezhaysee* ^A [the Marten Clan] who now calls Toronto home. She is the founder and lead horticulture technician of *Ziigwan* Designs, whose work primarily focuses on tropical plants, which are central to the designs she creates. She is deeply committed to blending modern horticultural practices with the beauty of the natural world. She strives to create environments that thrive and inspire.

Sage Petahtegoose is a writer, actor, Atikameksheng Anishnawbek First Nation. She is a member of the Canadian Roots Exchange, a national youth organization with a mission to strengthen reconciliation and relationships between Indigenous & non-Indigenous youth by facilitating dialogue through leadership programs, exchanges, national gatherings, and workshops.

Duke Redbird is an Ojibwe Elder, artist, writer, and activist from Saugeen First Nation. For many years, Elder Redbird has worked on many fronts to educate the public and re-introduce an Indigenous presence along Toronto's waterfront, notably with the *Wigwam Chi-Chemung*: Indigenous Interpretive Centre. Duke is an Elder and Artist in Residence at the Urban Indigenous Education Centre of the Toronto District School Board (TDSB). As a multidisciplinary artist, he brings an Indigenous lens to modern art and design and has aided in the emergence of a vibrant Indigenous presence on the contemporary cultural scene. Elder Redbird received an Honorary Doctorate from the Ontario College of Art and Design (OCAD) University in 2013.

Peter Schuler is an Elder, writer, artist, Teacher, from Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation and a member of the Minneweygaan Midewin Lodge in Manitoba. He works to fight racism and bring First Nations history and culture through teaching in primary and secondary schools, as well as co-teaching the First Nations and the Environment course at University of Waterloo.

Jim Dumont, *Onaubinisay* [Walks Above the Ground] is a Senior Elder, Chief of the Eastern Doorway of the Three Fires Midewiwin Lodge, keeper of the sacred water drum, and leader in the Eastern part of Anishinaabe Midewiwin Territory. He was the first Indigenous recipient of the Doctorate of Sacred Letters at The University of Sudbury in 2011, and is Professor Emeritus of Native Studies at Laurentian University. He has worked extensively with First Nations throughout Canada and the United States, not only as an expert in cultural knowledge but in establishing cultural frameworks for community engagement, governance, language, and Indigenous knowledge.

Correspondent Circle Participants

Additional participants were involved through materials circulation and invited to provide written considerations:

- Diane Longboat, Elder & Educator, Six Nations of the Grand River First Nation
- Rick Hill, Order of Canada, Elder, History & Cultural Leader, Six Nations of the Grand River First Nation
- Ben Cousineau, Historical Research Specialist for Chippewas of Rama First Nation

- Dave Mowat, Former Chief of Alderville First Nation, Director of the Ontario Historical Society Board
- Dr. John Steckley, Researcher/Specialist of Wendat language

Staff Coordination: City of Toronto & Partner Participants

- Liz McHardy, Partner, LURA, Co-facilitator
- Melanie Sifton, MinoKamik Collective, horticulturist and urban forestry researcher, University of Toronto
- Cadhla Gray, Project Lead, Waterfront Secretariat, City Planning, City of Toronto
- Eric Sehr, Project Manager, Waterfront Secretariat, City Planning, City of Toronto
- Ruthanne Henry, Senior Project Manager with Parks, Forestry & Recreation's Capital Projects Design and Delivery, City of Toronto
- Netami Stuart, Senior Project Manager, Parks for the Port Lands Flood Protection Project at Waterfront Toronto

Broader Indigenous Community Engagement

In addition to the Indigenous Advisory Circle, broader Indigenous community engagement occurred throughout the process. During this process, the City connected with First Nations, Inuit, Métis, and urban Indigenous organizations and communities to discuss broader Reconciliation Action Plan opportunities in the Port Lands, including place naming, placekeeping, language revitalization, housing, and stewardship. This outreach included the Mississaugas of Credit First Nation, Six Nations of the Grand River, Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council, Toronto & York Region Métis Council, and others.

The Waterfront Secretariat has met with the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation (MCFN) Major Projects staff since 2022 on waterfront revitalization initiatives, building off the existing relationship between Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation and Waterfront Toronto. A meeting was held with MCFN staff in November 2023 on the Port Lands, and further opportunities provided to continue discussing cultural revitalization, placekeeping, and reconciliation action in the Port Land. A meeting was also held with Six Nations of the Grand River staff in May 2024 specific to the Port Lands, following up on an early 2022 meeting on waterfront revitalization broadly (see [Next Phase of Waterfront Revitalization Indigenous Engagement Summary Report](#)).

Outreach to urban Indigenous organizations included the Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council (TASSC)⁶. While a presentation was not made for this initiative specifically, the Waterfront Secretariat met with TASSC and the Aboriginal Affairs Advisory Committee (AAAC) on the [Next Phase of Waterfront Revitalization](#), about embedding “truth, justice, and reconciliation, including through Indigenous engagement” in the four priorities of the renewed vision for waterfront revitalization moving forward. Overall, the mission of the Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) was reasserted at the AAAC meeting and then by City Council through [EX34.38](#). The mission of the Reconciliation Action Plan was reasserted, which states that “The City will dedicate time, space,

⁶ Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council (TASSC) includes [24 Urban Indigenous services member agencies](#).

and money with the goal of returning land to Indigenous governments, communities, collectives, and organizations" and further include that the mission of the Reconciliation Action Plan applies to agencies, boards, and commissions, including Waterfront Toronto and CreateTO, and should be a core consideration in the redevelopment of all city-owned properties.

Indigenous Community Events & Public Pop-Ups

The project team engaged with hundreds of people through pop-ups who shared their name ideas and input on the guiding principles for the naming initiative. To reach urban Indigenous residents with diverse backgrounds, ages, perspectives, and interests, the MinoKamik and LURA team, in collaboration with the City of Toronto Waterfront Secretariat and Indigenous Affairs Office staff, attended two pop-up events with booths to share information about the renaturalized river in the Port Lands, future neighbourhoods and the Port Lands Indigenous Place Naming Initiative. Maps, opportunities to provide name ideas, and handouts with a survey QR code were distributed. The first pop-up was held at the Indigenous Arts Festival at Fort York on June 16, 2024. The second pop-up was held at the Native Canadian Centre of Toronto's National Indigenous People's Day event at the Harbourfront Centre on June 21, 2024. Waterfront Secretariat staff also attended the annual MCFN BBQ in Hagersville, ON, on September 18th, where they shared information with families about the Elder-led naming process and guiding philosophy *Akinomaagewin* and principles developed, as well as context on the planning for future surrounding parkland (opening in 2025) and neighbourhoods (expected in the 2030s).

Online Public Survey

An online survey was made public from June to September 2024. The survey was shared via in-person pop-ups, Indigenous Advisory Circle participants' networks, and the City of Toronto's Indigenous Affairs Office newsletter and events, which included many urban Indigenous organizations and youths. The purpose of the survey was to gather feedback on the guiding principles for the naming initiative, share information on the process led by the guiding philosophy and teaching of *Akinomaagewin* and the Indigenous Advisory Circle, and share examples of potential name ideas. 19 respondents shared their detailed views on the project guiding principles and name ideas.

Videos

At the same time, videos were produced in a strong collaboration between Sage Petahtegoose, Indigenous youth, filmmaker, and Advisory Circle member, and Ryan Walker, photographer/videographer commissioned to document the Port Lands Flood Protection project over the last 5+ years. The purpose of these brief documentaries and videos was to share the process with the public, to inform Torontonians about the Advisory Circle, *Akinomaagewin* guiding philosophy, and that a name is coming for the emerging Island that many (plants, animals, and humans) may eventually call home. Even more will visit and reconnect with the land and life-giving waters.

What We Heard

Co-Developed Naming Guiding Principles

The following guiding principles were co-developed to inform this project; they were developed through discussions with participants from the Indigenous Advisory Circle.

- **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.
- **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.
- **Shared Creation Stories, Concepts and Responsibilities** – Acknowledge shared creation stories and the responsibilities that come with them, ensuring these are reflected in the name.
- **Place for Learning, Storytelling, and Stewardship** – Recognize the island as a new place where land stewards can gather and teach about land stewardship.

Below are the highlights and reflections from the Circle sessions and discussions. The notes are not meant to be verbatim and are written as highlights.

Name Lifted Up for The Island: Ookwemin Minising

Ookwemin Minising: The place of the black cherry trees



- This healing marshland and sandy soil was known to have black cherry⁷ trees. Trees historic to the waterfront and throughout most of Southern Ontario were cut down during area settlement and industrialization. There are black cherry trees included in the planting plans for the restoration of the mouth of the river and there are historic references to cherry trees in the area reflected in the Cherry Beach and Cherry Street names still in use in the area today.
- This name reflects how language is written on the land and helps recognize place through Indigenous culture and ecology. A related example is *Adobigook* [Etobicoke, the place of the alder trees].

Other Name Ideas and Highlights

MiskwaadesMiniss^A: Turtle Island as mentioned in Creation stories

Mikinaak/Mizhiken^A (snapping turtle).



- The turtle is a central part of creation stories across Indigenous nations and cultures, and it could encourage fish and turtle clans to take up their responsibilities of protecting water.

⁷ [*Prunus serotina*](#) is the [black cherry tree](#) species common to the GTA.

- “If it was Turtle Island, what kind of turtle? There are 3 different ways to say it. What is referred to in creation stories?” [Note: Different regions have specific names for Turtle Island in reference to North America.]

Biidaasige^A: Sunlight shining toward us, shining light, approaching light, shines this way, the way the light moves.



- Bringing attention to water.
- “We may not have as much attention to water today if not for her [Josephine Mandamin] and the Water Walkers spawning the movement.”
- The concept of light relates to paint colour and bridge design [in the Port Lands], which are related to the sun, sunset, and sunrise, as well as the flow of water.

Noojemowaning^A, **Mashkiig**^A: A place of healing, marshlands, medicines gathering, restoring balance.



- “Looking at pre-history before settlement, before treaties, this place was known to us as *noojemowaning* [a healing place].”
- “Healing is what those [marsh] plants are doing – cleaning, making the land and water habitable again.”

Biindigen^A: Welcome, come in.

- “Doesn’t just mean come in, but also that it is a sheltered, safe, protected place...This is a place that we’ve all had our hands and moccasin tracks in to create something safe, sheltered.”
- “[There has been] consideration for protection [in this river renaturalization project] with constructed banks for the ice to go so they don’t come and destroy the plants.”



ManidooMiniss^A: Spirit island, water spirit

- The sound of creation.
- Where creation sings.
- Where people & water come together.



Memengwaa^A: Butterfly, change, transformation, returning to the same place.

Additional names and concepts can be found in the appendices.



Related Discussion Streams

Ojibwe language spelling

Anishinaabemowin/Ojibwemowin is an oral language and dialects may be highly endangered in some regions, will vary among communities, and written spellings will also vary. In the *Akinomaagewin* naming process, great effort has been taken to build consensus on names and spelling for writing and signage purposes. Regional language interpretations and flexibility for

spelling and pronunciation variations are also important for Indigenous community accessibility and acknowledgement.

In Ojibwe we have no standard spelling. There are efforts to standardize but spelling changes from region to region. There is a push sometimes to use double vowels, or other spellings. I write and spell as I hear. My spelling changes for certain words depending on how I feel today. For us the language is alive so it is constantly changing...The only reason we had to start writing is because we were losing the language because of residential schools and cultural oppression, so writing the language became vital to its survival. Writing the language is something quite new to us but now doing this process here is helpful to us too. - Jerry Fontaine, Sagkeeng First Nation

Visual representation of place names

It was recommended to create **Indigemojis** [visual pictograph/emoji-type interpretations] of the place names to increase understanding and accessibility for a wide range of cultures and people. This is in line with Indigenous traditional use of pictographs as well as current technology, such as emojis in cell-phone communications.

Making room for Indigenous protocols and ceremony in official processes

The *Akinomaagewin* process was guided through traditional Indigenous protocols by Elder Shelley Charles and Circle participants. Examples demonstrated within meetings include a multi-generational approach to bring youth and Elders together, smudge and tobacco ceremony, traditional circle meeting closings and openings led by Elders in their language, and making time for inclusive circle introductions and discussion. Next steps require additional Elder-led guidance in appropriate protocols for closing the *Akinomaagewin* Circle, sharing the naming narratives, celebrating the process, and presenting the names to City Council. The gifting and celebration of Indigenous place names, *Ookwemin Minising* and *Biidaasige*, as determined through the *Akinomaagewin* process, builds trust and shared responsibility with the City of Toronto and the Indigenous community to thoughtfully care for these new places. This is an innovative approach to reconciliation.

Next Steps

Continual First Nations, Inuit, Métis and urban Indigenous community engagement through Toronto waterfront initiatives will further the Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) commitments. These past, current, and future engagement processes will continue to inform related projects and provide a framework for further Indigenous cultural revitalization and reconciliation through the Port Lands, as outlined in the attached Staff Report.

This initiative is a new, innovative, and dynamic collaboration across the City of Toronto and diverse Indigenous communities.

There is a strong desire from the City of Toronto to continue strengthening relationships with First Nations, Inuit, Métis, and urban Indigenous communities and for deeper involvement and ongoing collaboration in the planning, development, and stewardship of *Ookwemin Minising*, *Biidaasige*, and the surrounding area.

Appendix A – Long List Name Considerations/Ideas

Name ideas rising to the forefront

- *Noojemowaning* [a place of healing]
 - healing Island, marshland
- *Biindigen/Bindegwan* [come in, welcome, shelter, protection]
- *MiskwaadesMiniss* [Turtle Island -snapping turtle or painted turtle]
- *Biidaasige* [sunlight shining toward us, shines this way, the way the light moves, sunlight shining toward us] is a reference to the original Water Walker, Josephine Mandamin's name, *Biidaasige*.
- *Manidoominiss* [spirit island]
 - [the sound of creation, where creation sings]
 - [gathering place; where people & water come together]
- *Dabinoowa* ^A [sheltered, safe place] – building on the concept of *Biindigen*
- *Ookwemin/Ookwemin Minising* [place of the black cherry trees]
- *Amik* ^A [beaver]– perhaps for a street, related smaller area on the island
- *Niigani-gichigami* ^A [the leading lake or leading sea]
- *Akinomaagewin* Island [the earth as Teacher] -reflects the ethos of the process
- *Gete-ziibing* ^A [old river- acknowledging the original place the river was]
- *Shki-mnising* ^A [new island]
- *Nibinaabe* ^A [water spirit]
- *Akiwenzii* ^A [Earth Man, earth steward]
- 8th fire island - Recognizing the 8th fire and shared responsibility to each other including animals and plants
- Thirteenth Island -The treaty number of which the lands of Toronto fall under circa 1805
- *Aamiwag* ^A [they spawn], *Ondaadiziike* ^A [give birth], *Miishkooki*, *Waabshko ko* ^A [marsh]"
 - “Both *Aamiwag* and *Ondaadiziike* relate to new life, renewal. Already spawning is happening at the site. This is what delta areas do as they include marsh, swap a habitat for new life, cleansing, and reclaiming water land for sustainable futures for all our relatives.”
- *Tkaronto* Island [where there are standing trees in the water]

Appendix B – Circle Overviews and Highlights

Circle #1 – April 18, 2024

Meeting Overview:

The intention of the circle was to meet as a group (online) for the first time to get to know each other and to introduce the project to name the emerging island in the Port Lands, temporarily referred to as “Villiers” Island at the mouth of the Don River along Toronto’s waterfront. This island has been part of the [Port Lands Flood Protection Project \(PLFP\)](#), funded by the municipal, provincial, and federal governments and executed by Waterfront Toronto, which includes the restoration of the historic Don River mouth wetlands, creating a new naturalized river mouth, and post-industrial remediation of areas of concern.

Meeting Highlights:

- The process of naming an island at the Waterfront is being undertaken by this diverse circle of Indigenous Elders, Knowledge Keepers, language speakers, historians and subject matter experts in the spirit of *Gizhewaudiziwin* ^A[loving generosity] and working together in the spirit of *Minobimaadiziwin* ^A[in a good way].
- How can we recognize and bring renewed attention to *Aki* ^A[the earth], inclusive of land, water, plants, animals, people? Prioritization of the environment over people is important, but also important to draw attention to the waters here. “We are all water people,” and watersheds, and the concept of “water to water” is a major point of connection and potential healing for all.
- Land acknowledgement is important to discuss and need not be static. Current land acknowledgments may need to be revised to better reflect reconciliation. Acknowledgement of earth and other non-human clans may need to be included and mentioned before humans.
- In the process of naming, are we reclaiming/restoring and remembering? What should be acknowledged with a name? Name(s) should reflect the spirit of this process and place.
- Additional images & maps of the watershed and references were requested and will be shared by City staff with the Circle and included in the next presentation.

Circle #2 – May 3, 2024

Meeting Overview:

The intention of the circle was to meet as a group in person for the first time to continue to get to know each other and continue discussions on naming the island and parkland at the mouth of the Don River in Toronto, which is part of the Waterfront Toronto (WT) remediation and development zone.

The aim is that this group can work to put a list of names together for the island, which is a place that has undergone huge change. The Circle, composed of local Indigenous archivists, Elders, Knowledge Holders, language speakers, youth, and researchers, will make suggestions and discuss names for the island in an iterative process.

Meeting Highlights:

- During opening words, Elder Dr. Duke Redbird and several participants noted their appreciation for having the meeting conducted with words spoken in Anishinaabemowin and with inclusive explanations of language. There was a range of Indigenous language speakers in the meeting, ranging from first language speakers to new learners. The tone was set with encouragement to speak thoughtfully from the heart and create sparks to light a fire.
- The Circle naming process is new and unique in Toronto. Priority is now to work together to discuss and name the island. Support for this process has been provided by City of Toronto Council, as well as City divisions and agency partners.
- The location, status, and current plans for the island were discussed, with details and maps provided by the Waterfront Secretariat, Parks, Forestry & Recreation and Waterfront Toronto. A series of meetings with the Naming Circle is planned from April to September 2024, along with wider community engagement on the subject. The intent is to have a short list of names proposed for the island that will be put forth to City Council this Fall.

Name Ideas and Discussion:

- Acknowledging and caring for *Aki*, the earth, and earth/island muskrat and Turtle Island origin stories.
- Indigenous stewardship and leadership concepts.
- Importance of water connections, fishing, and aquatic activities for local Indigenous communities and particularly in this place.
- Recommendations for balancing politics & inclusivity.
- Local Indigenous history and naming: balancing research, archives, and oral histories.
- What makes this project and process different, and secures its future?
- Land and stewardship rights at the island.
- Interpretations of historic Wampum Treaty agreements.
- Guiding Values and Principles for Naming:
 - In the process of naming, are we reclaiming/restoring and remembering? What should be acknowledged with a name? Name(s) should reflect the spirit of the land, water, and this process.

- We are calling out and lifting up the name for the island. How a name is connected to the land is a process in thinking of the spirit of the place.
- Prioritize other parts of creation before humans.
- Acknowledging our shared creation stories and responsibilities.
- Acknowledging a place that is brand new, a place where stewards of the land can gather and teach about land stewardship.
- Find concepts that have unified origins across nations.
- Maybe there is a word that describes what it means to create something brand new through community that represents the future of our country and continued collaboration and stewardship? This is a place where stewards of the land can gather and make the stewardship practices known to all who are streaming onto Turtle Island.
- It is a man-made island but we are man-unmaking as humans and healing problems we have created. Recalling back to the creation story is important. Whatever we make and name should recall our responsibility to make sure it doesn't happen again.

Circle #3 – June 27, 2024

Meeting Overview:

Circle participants had a morning site walk of the Port Lands Flood Protection area and associated Island. Tour commentary was provided by Shannon Baker (Waterfront Toronto), Cam Coleman (Ellis Don), and PLFP Waterfront Toronto photographers: Ryan Walker and Vid Ingelevics. A discussion on naming the area followed the site tour at the Waterfront Toronto office board room.

Meeting Highlights:

- Impressed at all the plantings, animals, and bioengineering, and likened the explanation of the river “bathtub” to a teaching from Elder Rick Hill (who couldn't attend but has been invited to the Naming Circle from Six Nations of the Grand River First Nation, SNGR) that the most important thing is to clean out the “bowl” (“Dish” with One Spoon) before using it/putting other things in. Similar to what was done here, there was a group effort of many people to clean the area and put it back to have a good start.
- Nice to see all the native plantings and impressed with weeding of Phragmites.
- Saw egret, mockingbird, heard about the fish species that have returned.
- Saw the animal-inspired children's play structures under construction.

Name Ideas and Discussion:

- *Noojemowaning* – a place of healing.

- *Mashkiig* – marsh (meaning is similar to a place of healing, cleansing, medicines, “where our medicines are collected, and medicines are what is used to restore balance.”)
 - “this was a place people would gather for special meetings, portage through, filled up with medicine, with food with life”
 - “the water that goes through the marsh is different than the water that enters the lake” → the people that go through the island are different from the people who enter the island.
- *Memengwaa* [butterfly] → change and transformation, migration, pollination, travelling yet returning to the same place.
- *Bindegwan* – Welcoming safe space/sheltered place → “doesn’t just mean come in, but also that it is safe” “a place that we’ve all had our hands and moccasin tracks in to create something safe, sheltered.”
- *Mikinaak* ^ [snapping turtle] – Turtle Island → Turtle is a part of creation stories across Indigenous nations and cultures – encourage those fish and turtle clans to take up their responsibilities with protecting water.
- Reference to Josephine *Mandamin* / *Biidaasige* [she brings light/shining light] for her work with water walks in Canada.

Circle #4 – July 30, 2024

Meeting Overview:

Circle participants had a morning site walk of the Port Lands Flood Protection (PLFP) area and associated island. Tour commentary was provided by Waterfront Toronto’s Netami Stewart & Shannon Baker, with discussions with several PLFP workers actively engaged in completing the project safely and respectfully. A discussion on naming the area followed the site tour at the CreateTO office board room, with some Circle participants joining via Zoom. PLFP Waterfront Toronto photographer Ryan Walker joined to document the site tour and meeting.

Meeting Highlights

Circle participants were concerned about the fate of the project area in the wake of recent severe flooding in the Don River Valley, but were assured that the Port Lands Flood Protection project functioned as designed and there was no flood damage to the site.

...we must consider and mitigate the effects of these weather events, if possible. I was glad to visit there and glad people had a chance to walk the area today. It is very impressive to see the work done to date and the consideration given to bring back the marsh -the place where things are purified through the water flow... The opportunity that we have here is really important historically and throughout North America. -Bryan Loucks, Hiawatha First Nation

Discussions followed on the importance of natural water regulation systems (marsh, beaver, etc.) and how the Water Walkers, starting with Josephine Mandamin, brought new light to the water.

The importance of water gathering and healing as it passes through the marsh was reflected upon as the Port Lands projects are also bringing people, water, and organisms together. Collective work and intergenerational collaborations were also called out as vital to the process of restoration and reconciliation.

After today, I'll never be at a meeting again without young people... they must be at every single board room and council and planning session as they help us to remember our memories from our backgrounds. When we hear their voices, we also remember the intention: *Ishpadinaa inademowin* ^A [to lift up our thinking]. -Elder Shelley Charles, Chippewas of Georgina Island First Nation

Discussions on the feelings of nature, gathering, safety, healing, relaxing, re-emergence, and repair continued as the Circle reacted to the thriving new plants and animals returning to the new parkland and river mouth.

This is a place of healing. It will heal by bringing Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to learn how to be together... It is beautiful. It is healing itself already and it can heal us physically, spiritually, and mentally. -Luanne Cunningham, Lac Ste. Anne Métis

We discussed how native plants started to grow even after being buried for 100 years... it will become a place where people will go to reconnect, to hear creation sing and speak... This whole thing is emerging from what has been covered up. -Elder Peter Schuler, Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation

Name Ideas and Discussion:

- *Noojemowaning* [a place of healing; Concept of the earth self-regulating]
- *Biindigen/Bindegwan* [come in, welcome, shelter, protection]
- *MiskwaadesMiniss* [Turtle Island -snapping turtle or painted turtle]
- *Biidaasige* [sunlight shining toward us, shines this way, the way the light moves, sunlight shining toward us] Reference to original Water Walker, Josephine Mandamin's name, *Biidaasige*.
- *Manidoominiss* [spirit island]
 - [the sound of creation, where creation sings]
 - [gathering place; where people & water come together]
- *Dabinoowa* [sheltered, safe place] – building on the concept of *Biindigen*
- *Amik* [beaver]– perhaps for a street, related smaller area on the island
- *Niigani-gichigami* [the leading lake or leading sea]

Circle #5 – August 20, 2024

Meeting Overview:

Circle participants met online with the City of Toronto and partners to discuss names proposed to date for the Port Lands Indigenous place-naming with a focus on names for the Island. Names

discussed have been brought forward through Circle discussions as well as an online survey circulated to members of the Toronto Indigenous community and through direct in person engagement at the Native Centre of Toronto's Harbourfront National Indigenous People's Day celebration. City of Toronto approved the survey and also released it to their networks.

Meeting Highlights:

- *Noojemowaning* [a place of healing]
- *Biindigen/Bindegwan* [come in, welcome, shelter, protection]
- *MiskwaadesMiniss* [Turtle Island -snapping turtle or painted turtle]
- *Biidaasige* [sunlight shining toward us, shining light, h/she who brings the light]. Reference to original Water Walker, Josephine Mandamin's name, *Biidaasige*.
- *Manidoominiss* ^[spirit island], [where creation sings]
- A gathering place, where people & water come together

New ideas discussed:

- *Ookweminissing* [black cherry island] / *Ookwemin* [black cherry tree]

...it was remembered that along that shore line near the Don River the black cherry grew... consider naming this place for that black cherry, *Ookwemin*. It naturally grows along those shore lines... - Elder Jeff Monague, Beausoleil First Nation

- *Aamiwag / Ondaadiziike* [they spawn, give birth]
 - renewal, life, in line with emerging island, as well as *mashkiig* [marsh] and *noojemowaning* [place of healing]

Circle #6 – September 5, 2024

Meeting Overview:

This was the 6th Circle meeting for the *Akinomaagewin* process designated to name the Island & Park in the Port Lands. This Naming Circle was hosted in person with lunch at the Native Canadian Centre of Toronto (NCCT). A special Chi-Miigwech to the new Executive Director of the Native Canadian Centre of Toronto, Arlene Dodge, for her active participation in community engagement and role hosting this Circle at the Centre. Circle members who could not attend in person joined on Zoom or commented and voted on their preferred Island names in advance. There was a screening of a moving *Akinomaagewin* documentary video by Sage and Ryan, which was a work in progress.

Liz (LURA) provided some introductory words on the Port Lands place-naming initiative, and Shelley provided an overview of names discussed for the island and noted that there are future naming opportunities for other places in addition to the island. Discussions were followed with two rounds of open ranked voting for the name of the Island, where votes were shared and counted from those in the room and online, as well as advanced votes collected from circle members who could not

make it that day. *Ookweminissing [Ookwemin Minising]*⁸ was the top choice to name the Island by consensus vote. For full affirmation of the chosen name, the Circle, in ceremony, stood up and spoke the name in the Four Directions.

Meeting Highlights:

Name ideas that rose to the forefront from prior discussions:

- *Noojemowaning* [a place of healing]
- *Biindigen* [come in, welcome, shelter, protection]
- *MiskwaadesMiniss* [Turtle Island -snapping turtle or painted turtle]
- *Biidaasige* [sunlight shining toward us, shining light, approaching light, sunlight shining toward us]
- *Manidoominiss*^A [spirit island]
- *Ookweminissing [Ookwemin Minising]* [black cherry island]

Ranked Ballot Result for the Island name:

Round 1

1. *Ookwemin Minising*
2. *Biidaasige*
3. *Biindigen*
4. *Noojemowaning*

Round 2

1. *Ookwemin Minising*
2. *Biidaasige*

Final Consensus

- *Ookwemin Minising*

⁸ Anishinaabemowin/Ojibwemowin [and local Indigenous languages] are oral phonetic languages, only recently partially recorded, with variability according to dialects and personal expression. Some Ojibwe spellings changed through the process as Circle consensus was reached on the final names and spelling for written documents/signage. Visual representation (images) and celebration of flexibility in oral language variation & dialects is recommended to accompany presentation of Indigenous place names as a reflection of vibrant regional language traditions and expression.

Circle #7 – October 3, 2024

Meeting Overview: Circle participants met online with City of Toronto and partners to discuss names proposed to date for the Port Lands Indigenous place-naming initiative with a focus on names for the island and new park.

Fred introduced the meeting and said that Elder Shelley Charles was unable to attend. All agreed that they were ok to proceed with the Circle meeting with the understanding that we would circle back to Shelley on next steps. The latest edit of the *Akinomaagewin* video produced by Sage and Ryan was shown. Names discussed were those that have been brought forward through previous Circle naming process discussions. Ookwemin Minising was confirmed as the name for the Island, and Biidaasige was voted on and lifted up to the Four Directions as the name for the Park.

Meeting Highlights:

Ookwemin Minising [place of the black cherry trees] was reconfirmed as the name for the island.

Ookwemin Minising [place of the black cherry trees] is acknowledging the history of the land here. It reflects the whole *Akinomaagewin* process and was partially inspired by other place names close by, like *Adoobigok* [place of the alders] and *Wonscotonach*, and the history of trees in the area. This name talks about restoration, history and the future. There are 80+ black cherry trees planted on the island and there is a history of them there.

Additional comments on the significance of black cherry referenced use of the tree for medicine, and connections to the birthing process, healing, and female leadership:

We also talk about a tree [black cherry] that has medicine given to women to help with the birthing process. We are birthing something new here. This connects to that concept of the tree and process of the name being birthed that will grow into something else. -Elder Jeff Monague, Beausoleil First Nation

...on the name that Jeff shared and on the name referencing the importance of women in the process and history: there is teaching in the name in reference to healing, Ookwemin Minising => kwe is our word for woman. -Jerry Fontaine

The entire group in attendance expressed support for the island name to be *Ookwemin Minising*, including resounding support from two Circle members who were not sure about it during prior discussions after hearing additional reflections and connections.

Biidaasige [sunlight shining toward us] was confirmed as the **chosen name for the new Park** at the new mouth of the Don River.

- Shining light, sunlight shining towards us.
- The position of the Park with the Don River running along the east side means this is where the light of the sun will hit first thing in the morning.
- Relates to this project's work centred on and bringing attention to water.

- Reflects back to new light and new life and birth, which speaks to how we are bringing forth something new with this project and process.
- The concept of sunlight over water relates to paint colours of the new Port Lands bridges corresponding to sunrise, midday and sunset.
- Light is associated with enlightenment, acknowledging Indigenous communities who have brought light to the significance of water as essential to life.
- The Circle emphasizes that naming places for specific people is not done in [Anishinaabe] tradition, this is an acknowledgement of the role of strong women in the Water Walker movement and in this restoration project, and a nod to Josephine Mandamin (*Biidaasige*).

Light is associated with enlightenment. Josephine was an enlightened individual who brought a light to something that was in the dark: importance of water. Water represents life to all creatures on earth. Without understanding this obvious reality, it seemed to need a person to bring a simple truth to the world we live in. This is the way the creator managed to bring this about. I like the story of how this discussion and the naming came about with the sun rise and set. It goes back not just to our own culture but to everyone on earth and horizon. - Elder Dr. Duke Redbird

Ojibwe language/spelling variability & interpretation was discussed as an example of the richness in Ojibwe dialects and a manifestation of living oral language traditions.

Oral phonetic Ojibwe word spellings are variable, with dialect, personal, and regional interpretations. Written Ojibwe is evolving and intrinsically connected to place and many words and dialects are only now being recorded in an effort to preserve and revitalize the language. As Elder Shelley Charles emphasized throughout the *Akinomaagewin* process, “the language is written on the land.”

Inclusion of visual representations of the new Port Lands place names is recommended to enhance broader understanding of the meanings behind the names. Circle Elders coined the term **Indigemojis** [visual pictograph/emoji-type interpretations] to help with this name interpretation & communication process. This is in line with Indigenous traditional use of pictographs as well as current popular emojis in cell-phone communications.

Next steps in appropriate protocols for closing the *Akinomaagewin* Circle, sharing the naming narratives, celebrating the process, and presenting the names to City Council were discussed.

Appendix C – Resources List and Links

Assembly of First Nations. (2024). Assembly of First Nations - Community Services - Languages Website. [Languages - Assembly of First Nations \(afn.ca\)](https://languages-assemblyoffirstnations.ca/)

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Waterfront Toronto. (2022). Revitalizing Indigenous stories and culture at Waasayiskodenayosh and the Port Lands. Waterfront Toronto. <https://www.waterfronttoronto.ca/news/revitalizing-indigenous-stories-and-culture-waasayishkodenayosh-and-port-lands>