

City Council

Motion without Notice

MM19.31	ACTION			Ward: All
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Authorization to Repatriate Two Specified Objects from the City of Toronto’s Museum Collection to the Métis National Council - by Mayor Olivia Chow, seconded by Councillor Alejandra Bravo

** Notice of this Motion has not been given. A two-thirds vote is required to waive notice.
* This Motion is subject to referral to the Economic and Community Development Committee. A two-thirds vote is required to waive referral.
* This Motion has been deemed urgent by the Chair.*

Recommendations

Mayor Olivia Chow, seconded by Councillor Alejandra Bravo, recommends that:

1. City Council direct the General Manager, Economic Development and Culture, to repatriate the following two objects of historical and community significance to the Métis people from the City of Toronto’s Museum Collection to the Métis National Council during the Back to Batoche Festival scheduled for July 18 to 21, 2024, in Saskatchewan:

- a. a tobacco pouch beaded in a traditional Métis style and dated to circa 1890; and
- b. a letter initially thought to be written by Louis Riel on May 6, 1885.

Summary

On August 31, 2023, City staff received a formal repatriation claim from the Métis National Council regarding two objects of significance to Métis history and culture that are currently held by the City of Toronto’s Museum Collection.

The first object is a tobacco pouch beaded in a traditional Métis style and dated to circa 1890. In August 2022, the authenticity and origin of the pouch were verified by a leading Métis material history expert. The second object is a letter initially thought to be written by Louis Riel on May 6, 1885, two days before the Battle of Batoche. Further research on the letter uncovered evidence of a period forgery, but the object remains part of Louis Riel’s story and holds importance to the Métis nation.

On April 4, 2024, City staff met with the Métis National Council President and Chief of Staff, who reaffirmed the Métis National Council’s repatriation claim and extended an invitation to City staff to repatriate the tobacco pouch and the letter to the Métis people at the Back to Batoche Festival, which is scheduled for July 18 to 21, 2024 in Saskatchewan. Subject to the authorization by City Council, this would be the first repatriation of sacred objects from the City of Toronto’s Museum Collection.

[2013.ED27.6 - Policies for City of Toronto Museum Collections](#) addresses repatriation under Deaccessioning and Disposal. Under Criterion 3.1.1(h), “an artifact may be deaccessioned if it is the subject of a successful claim for repatriation.” Both objects have been subject to a claim of repatriation and have been approved for deaccession as neither fits the City’s collecting mandate.

The Director, Indigenous Affairs Office has signalled her support for this experience to be used by the City as an opportunity to learn and engage with community on the development of a corporate Repatriation Policy, which is currently under development and will be forthcoming to City Council in early 2025.

Financial implications associated with this repatriation will be minimal and can be absorbed within the Economic Development and Culture Division’s 2024 budget. Expenditures arising from the repatriation are anticipated to be less than \$3,000. The funds will be used to cover the cost of one staff member from the Museums and Heritage Services team from Economic Development and Culture to travel to the Back to Batoche Festival, where the repatriation will take place.

This motion is urgent because the repatriation event is taking place July 18, prior to the next Council meeting.

Background Information (City Council)

Member Motion MM19.31