

Next Phase of Waterfront Revitalization - Indigenous Engagement Summary Report

Johnston Research Inc. & Waterfront Secretariat, City of Toronto
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Summary

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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.

We also acknowledge that the Treaties processes of Tkaronto referred to many issues and that these Treaties are not settled with regards to discussions about the ownership and stewardship of these lands. Therefore, concrete actions that advance a continuous process and practice of reconciliation are important to give meaning to land acknowledgements by putting words into action.

We would like to thank the numerous First Nations, Elders, Indigenous organizations, City of Toronto divisions, partners and agencies who have generously contributed their time and ideas to this project. Your energy and dedication are an inspiration to us all. Without your support this project would not have been the success that it has been.

As told by Grandma Pauline Shirt, Water Protector (Plains Cree First Nation):

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.





Background

Renewed Vision

As a result of engagement discussions completed by July 2022, a City Council-approved [report](#) outlined the following priorities of the renewed vision for waterfront revitalization:



Strategic and Inclusive Economic Development



Truth, Justice and Reconciliation, including through Indigenous Engagement



Equity, Inclusion and Access, including through Housing and Community Benefits



Climate Resilience and Sustainability

Input and recommendations from the ongoing engagement throughout 2022 and 2023 will be included in the follow-up report to City Council in September/October 2023.

The City's Reconciliation Action Plan

Summary – Potential Opportunities for Actions along the Waterfront

Themes	Actions
Actions to Restore Truth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • #2. Enhance Indigenous Education
Actions to Right Relations and Share Power	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • #5. Improve Relationships with Indigenous Organizations and Collectives • #6. Improve Relationships with Treaty and Territorial Partners • #7. Enhance Indigenous Civic Engagement • #8. Advocate for Indigenous Peoples to Provincial and Federal Governments
Actions for Justice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • #9. Address Racism • #10. Promote prosperity • #13. Support Indigenous Health and Well-being • #14. Increase Access to Affordable Housing • #15. Support Indigenous Placekeeping • #16. Celebrate Indigenous Arts and Culture • #17. Support the Revitalization of Indigenous Languages • #18. Improve Access to Traditional Foods and Medicines • #19. Return Land and Stewardship Rights
Actions to Make Financial Reparations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • #20. Improve Indigenous Economic Development • #21. Decolonize Honoraria Practices • #22. Establish a Commitment to Reconciliation with Businesses and Organizations • #23. Enhance Indigenous Recruitment and Retention within Toronto Public Service



Indigenous Engagement Process

Engagement Activities

Engagement activities included:

- 8 interviews with about 25 individuals representing First Nations, Inuit, Métis and urban Indigenous community organizations
- 2 discussions/teachings with Elders and/or Knowledge Keepers
- 1 community event with over 30 urban Indigenous youth, community members and Elders
- 1 Aboriginal Affairs Advisory Committee meeting
- Internal meetings with City Divisions, Agencies and Committees, including the Indigenous Affairs Office and Indigenous Affairs Community of Practice, to learn from past input and Indigenous engagement processes

Engagement Approach

The engagement approach used a distinctions-based approach involving First Nations, Inuit, Métis and urban Indigenous communities. One-on-one virtual interviews were held as well as one in-person community event and water ceremony.

The following groups participated in the engagement process.

First Nations Treaty and Territorial Partners:

- Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation
- Huron-Wendat Nation
- Six Nations of the Grand River

Indigenous Organizations:

- Toronto and York Region Métis Council (via Métis Nation of Ontario)
- ENAGB Indigenous Youth Agency
- Toronto Indigenous Community Advisory Board (TICAB)
- Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council (TASSC)
- Kapapamahchakwew (Wandering Spirit) Indigenous youth/students

City Divisions, Agencies and Committees:

- Aboriginal Affairs Advisory Committee
- City of Toronto Divisions and Agencies (e.g., Parks, Forestry & Rec; Waterfront Toronto)
- City of Toronto's Indigenous Affairs Community of Practice (IACOP)

Winter Solstice Water Ceremony & Dialogue

One-on-one interviews focused on First Nation, Inuit, Metis and urban Indigenous organization representatives, staff or board members, therefore the City heard feedback that there was a need to engage community members themselves, specifically youth, in non-colonial settings.

As a result, the City hosted a Winter Solstice Water Ceremony and Dialogue event with Grandmother Pauline Shirt and Elder Dr. Duke Redbird on December 20, 2022 at the Waterfront Neighbourhood Centre.

An invitation to Elders and Indigenous youth was shared to celebrate the winter solstice and water through ceremonies and teachings. Water ceremony and teachings were followed by a discussion about a collective vision for the waterfront and opportunities for advancing the City of Toronto's Reconciliation Action Plan through waterfront revitalization.





What We Heard: *Key Takeaways*



Engagement & Relationship-building

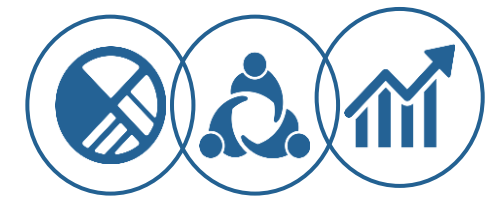
KEY TAKEAWAY	RAP ACTIONS	VISION PRIORITIES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build relationships early and intentionally, as it takes time – pre-engagement is a good approach for strengthening trust, gauging interest and developing appropriate engagement processes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> RAP Mission 5. and 6. – Improve Relationships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reconciliation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Culturally responsive, distinctions-based engagement that is focused on intentional relationship building with Elders, Knowledge Keepers, Indigenous youth, First Nations, Inuit, Métis and urban Indigenous communities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5. and 6. – Improve Relationships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reconciliation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build accountability into projects with measurable goals and monitoring frameworks and reporting back to Indigenous communities on Indigenous community impact, benefits and barriers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> RAP Mission 5. and 6. – Improve Relationships 8. Advocate for Indigenous Peoples 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reconciliation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build capacity and establish appropriate protocols, practices and processes for engaging different Indigenous communities (consider fee for service models, honoraria, cash gifts, tobacco offerings) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5. and 6. – Improve Relationships 21. Decolonize honoraria processes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reconciliation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure Métis and urban Indigenous communities are included in two-way communication between the Waterfront Secretariat and Indigenous Peoples, as they are citizens, tax-payers and residents of Toronto who are not represented by First Nations engaged as Treaty or Territorial Partners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5. and 6. – Improve Relationships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reconciliation

Affordable Housing, Returning Land and Stewardship Rights, Economic Development



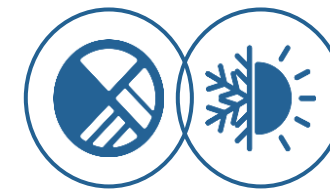
KEY TAKEAWAY	RAP ACTIONS	VISION PRIORITIES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Seek ways to implement Indigenous-owned affordable housing that is accessible for future generations (e.g., affordable housing that extends beyond Indigenous-led or managed models and 99-year leases, set asides) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> RAP Mission 14. Affordable Housing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reconciliation Equity/Access Economic
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Open communication channels to discuss and implement pathways to return land and stewardship rights along the water, explore co-management and co-monitoring approaches 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> RAP Mission 19 Return Land 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reconciliation Equity/Access Economic
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pursue tiered procurement processes that prioritize Indigenous businesses and/or social enterprises along the waterfront 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4., 9., 10., 20., and 21. Prosperity & Economic Development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reconciliation Economic
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify equitable economic opportunities and discuss with Treaty and Territorial partners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Improve Relationships 20. Economic Development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reconciliation Economic

Placekeeping, Access, Arts & Culture, Health & Wellbeing



KEY TAKEAWAY	RAP ACTIONS	VISION PRIORITIES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure place-keeping, cultural heritage and commemoration initiatives include the history of all First Nations, Métis and Inuit Peoples. Consider ways to include traditional names in spaces 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 15. Placekeeping 16. Arts and Culture 17. Language Revitalization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reconciliation Equity/Access Economic
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve overall physical access to the water and waterfront, this includes dedicated spaces for Indigenous communities (with recreational, cultural, ceremonial and sustaining opportunities, e.g., fishing, swimming, boat rides, spaces for pow wows and ceremonies etc.) These spaces should be close to transit, safe, and have accessible amenities (e.g., washrooms, kitchenette, fire pits). Indigenous groups should not have to “rent” their own lands, especially for ceremonial practices. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 15. Placekeeping 16. Arts and Culture 18. Access to Foods and Medicines 19. Return Land and Stewardship Rights 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reconciliation Equity/Access Climate
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider how heritage/placekeeping initiatives are not solely about remembering and celebrating the past but also about preserving the environment and natural resources for future generations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 13. Health and Wellbeing 15. Placekeeping 19. Return Land and Stewardship Rights 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reconciliation Inclusion/Access Climate
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider how to create accessible learning spaces that can be used by both education institutions and Indigenous organizations (renaming and placekeeping can educate the public as well as celebrate Indigenous culture) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Enhance Indigenous Education 15. Placekeeping 16. Arts and Culture 17. Language Revitalization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reconciliation Inclusion/Access

Environment and Climate Resilience



KEY TAKEAWAY	RAP ACTIONS	VISION PRIORITIES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Place a stronger emphasis on the significance and health of water in “waterfront revitalization” plans - involve Indigenous women and water keepers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 12. MMIWG 13. Health and Wellbeing 15. Placekeeping 18. Access to Foods and Medicines 19. Return Land and Stewardship Rights 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reconciliation Equity/Access Climate
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Balance environmental needs and impacts along the waterfront, protecting and preserving the water, land, local fauna and flora and natural resources for future generations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> RAP Mission 19. Return Land and Stewardship Rights 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Climate
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For many, preservation of marine habitats, watersheds, species of fish, local fauna and flora should take priority over housing development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 13. Health and Wellbeing 19. Return Land and Stewardship Rights 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Climate
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognize the ongoing caretaking role and responsibilities of all Indigenous Peoples, including the Métis, this may include co-monitoring and co-management approaches 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> RAP Mission 19. Return Land and Stewardship Rights 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reconciliation Climate
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Study land and water contaminations and solutions, this may include co-monitoring and co-management approaches. (e.g., water filtering system) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 19. Return Land and Stewardship Rights 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reconciliation Climate

What we Heard

“Interest is more focused on how the environment and natural resources will be left for future generations, than it is about commemorating specific historical places [such as] where a longhouse was built in the past... The lens used by city planning can tend to bring a colonial perspective, identifying and discussing specific projects and areas without considering how they impact or relate to the broader environment”

“I have gone to the lake for healing and to try to find secluded spaces to sing and do my offerings. I don't want to be in a position of having to teach others, answer questions or be on display to others passing by.”

“If you want to continue to engage youth (and you should) consider consulting teachers so we can help structure discussions. Youth should have time to think and talk in small groups and then share with the larger group. They have so much to offer!”

“The City and its partners appear to be making agreements and engaging more deeply with [certain groups over others]. This isn't aligned with the Dish with One Spoon covenant to share the land, equally.”

“Include cultural reconnecting to traditions and a space where you feel welcome. A place you can go and reconnect again. Currently there is a lack of empathy and understanding. Unity and understanding for culture and traditions is required to allow Indigenous Peoples to thrive.”

“[On Land back] The reason is not greed, it is an asset and not for profit Indigenous organizations would own and ensure it stays in community for generations to come. [This would] grow assets in the city and [provide] safety and a stable place to call home.”

“Have a call-out to all traditional knowledge keepers/Elders, and keepers of the water. [Those that] have a vested interest in the water and food is a good thing. Women know the teachings of the water; it is our very existence, and without it we wouldn't be alive.”

“Different procurement systems where Indigenous-led firms and businesses are considered first [at dedicated percentages] for different kinds of projects is key.”



Short and Long-term Engagement Goals

Overall

As found in the “[*Next Phase of the Waterfront Revitalization - Public and Stakeholder Engagement Summary*](#),” many Indigenous engagement participants also acknowledged that the four priorities are interconnected and are all relevant today.

However, within the Indigenous engagement sessions, the priority of **reconciliation** and relationship-building was found to be of strong importance, followed by climate sustainability and preserving land stewardship and returning land.

Short-term Goals

“It is terrific, the [City’s] Waterfront planning bodies’ recognition of importance to consult with the Indigenous community, [but] if the consultation doesn’t result in concrete benefits for the Indigenous community, it is time consuming.”

- Determine how best to integrate Indigenous knowledge and ways of doing into waterfront revitalization project(s) and processes
- Identify how projects will directly benefit Indigenous Peoples and communities of Toronto and set goals and outcomes that are measurable and realistic
- Open communication lines and make commitments geared at preserving land stewardship and returning land.
- Establish a City Planning divisional Indigenous Engagement Strategy and Staff Committee to build knowledge/capacity, improve internal coordination and build stronger relationships with Indigenous communities.

Long-term Goals

"I always see that vision, we are borrowing this land off our future generations and need to think of our children's children and our great-great grandchildren. Sacrifice housing for protecting the water, we need to ask more questions about developments, such as industrial buildings. Focus on nature trails and creating."

- Communication channels are established for consistent sharing of information (i.e. decisions, actions and outcomes) with Indigenous Peoples and communities of Toronto, especially as it relates to the advancement of the Reconciliation Action Plan along the waterfront.
- Goals and objectives related to preserving land stewardship and returning land are executed and the processes and decisions fully involve Indigenous Peoples.



Recommendations



Reconciliation

With the understanding that relationship building and trust takes time, build time for relationship building into the process. Consider the following:

- Invite individuals to meet in person in a comfortable setting that isn't in a colonial context, share a meal, attend gatherings to learn etc.
- Maintain transparency and reflect on how progress, agreements and engagement with a specific First Nation may impact the relationships, trust and perceptions among other First Nations.
- Ensure that the goals and outcomes of projects are measurable and realistic. Develop suitable mechanisms for regular knowledge sharing and reporting back to Indigenous communities. Many indicate that “*a measurable benefit is land back.*”



Equity and Economic Development

Consider the following:

- Give priority in the procurement process, this will also contribute to reconciliation in a financial sense.
- Through further engagement, identify the projects that would have a direct benefit to Indigenous communities and organizations. Wendake, for example, indicates they have capital project investments and interest in infrastructure investments and other opportunities that may arise.
- Consider prioritizing projects based on geographic location in proximity to the waterfront (i.e. Scarborough Bluffs, Toronto Islands, etc.), while ensuring that all nations are represented equally, particularly in regards to education materials (i.e. signage and information plaques)
- As youth are the future, it is critical to capture their interest in various areas of economic development. Some indicate there is also benefit to differentiating reporting between the voices of youth, Elders/traditional teachers where applicable.

Climate



Give agency to, and continue to collaborate with Indigenous organizations, Elders, youth, communities and water knowledge keepers on how best to care for and utilize the land. Consider the following:

- Continue to reflect on the significance in protecting not only the waterfront, but the entire lake, land and natural resources that surround it.
- Place priority on preserving marine habitats, watersheds, species of fish, local fauna and flora and mitigate the encroachment of invasive species. For many, this should take priority over housing developments.
- Consider how heritage initiatives are not solely about remembering and celebrating the past but also about preserving the environment and natural resources for future generations.



Ongoing Waterfront Projects

Ongoing Waterfront Projects & Engagement Opportunities

- Villiers Island & McCleary Precinct Plans
- Western Beaches Public Realm Plan
- Quayside
- PIC Core Urban Design Guidelines
- Tommy Thompson Park
- Scarborough Bluffs West EA

Find more information on our [website](#) under “Current and Future Projects”.

More detailed information and engagement timelines will be shared as updates become available.

Thank you!

Learn more at: www.toronto.ca/waterfrontnextphase

Contact us at: wps@toronto.ca

