

West Toronto Junction Area

Preliminary Report:

Indigenous Advisory Circle – Junction HCD Study

Draft 1.0

June 25, 2025

1. Introduction

This summary report outlines the inaugural meeting of the Indigenous Advisory Circle for the Junction Neighbourhood Heritage Conservation District (HCD) study. It aims to:

- Document the meeting structure, participants, and key discussion points.
- Highlight Indigenous perspectives shared during the Circle, including insights, concerns, and priorities related to the cultural and historical significance of the Junction area.
- Ensure that Indigenous knowledge systems and lived experiences are incorporated throughout the heritage planning process.
- Establish a foundation for ongoing collaboration between Acosys, EVOQ Architecture, the City, and the Advisory Circle.

This is a living document and will be updated as further conversations take place. It is intended to support transparency, relationship-building, and shared understanding across all Interest holders.

2. The Role of the Indigenous Advisory Circle

The Circle plays a central role in grounding the Junction HCD study in Indigenous knowledge, values, and relationships to land. Its purpose is to:

- Guide culturally respectful approaches to language, storytelling, and interpretation.
- Surface overlooked knowledge systems, oral histories, and lived experience that extend beyond colonial heritage frameworks.
- Provide input on locations, practices, and narratives that hold meaning for Indigenous communities.
- Ensure Indigenous voices help shape the study's scope, engagement, and outputs.

3. Meeting Overview

- **Date:** June 18, 2025
- **Location:** Virtual Teams Meeting, 1:00 – 2:30 PM

Participants:

- Elder Stephen Whitehawk LaForme, Cultural Advisor
- Cidalia Rodriguez, Medicine Woman
- Soleil Sliwa, Indigenous Education Teacher (TDSB)
- Carolynne Crawley* (Founder, Msit No'kmaq)
- Darin Wybenga* (Historian, Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation)

Note: Carolynne Crawley and Darin Wybenga were unable to attend but will be consulted.

Acosys Team:

- David Acco, Facilitator
- Julie Lepage, Facilitator
- Ryann Ironstand, Engagement Support
- Laurent Lavigne, Senior Consultant
- Moema Cavalcanti, Project Manager

Agenda Summary:

- Welcome by David Acco
- Opening Prayer and Smudge by Elder Stephen Whitehawk
- Guided Circle Discussion:
 1. Understanding Place
 2. Cultural and Historical Memory
 3. Outreach Support
 4. Closing Reflections

4. What We Learned

A. Significance of the Junction to Indigenous Communities

- The Junction is described as ancestral territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit, Haudenosaunee, and Wendat.
- The area is recognized as a spiritual and diplomatic crossroads where trade, ceremony, and inter-nation exchange occurred.
- Land is viewed as alive and relational; memory and teachings are embedded in place.
- Practices like ceremony, gardening, and planting are acts of reconnection and revitalization.

B. Key Themes and Priorities Identified

1. **Reviving Land-Based Practices:** Participants emphasized restoring Indigenous food systems, medicine planting, and ecological knowledge. Examples included creating medicine wheel gardens and food forests.
2. **Inclusive Heritage Interpretation:** There is a need for signage and storytelling grounded in Indigenous languages, emotion, and worldview. Participants urged the use of local languages and culturally resonant narratives.
3. **Youth-Centered Infrastructure:** Calls were made for youth-led programming and Indigenous community hubs in the Junction to foster intergenerational healing and cultural continuity.
4. **Beyond Symbolic Inclusion:** There was a shared caution against token gestures. Elders and participants advocated for ceremony, physical presence, and active engagement.
5. **Visibility of Diverse Urban Indigenous Identities:** Youth who are Afro-Indigenous, Asian-Indigenous, or urban-raised were highlighted as critical to the story. Their experiences must be centered.
6. **Ongoing Relationship Building:** There was strong interest in ensuring these discussions do not end in reports but become part of a long-term process.

C. Concerns Raised

- Risk of erasure due to colonial frameworks, privatization of sacred lands, or overly simplified "pan-Indigenous" narratives.
- Dismissal of traditional ecological knowledge in favor of colonial land use.
- Importance of avoiding prescriptive consultation and embracing community-led collaboration.

5. Opportunities Moving Forward

- Reclaim physical spaces for Indigenous presence: gardens, lodges, signage.
- Integrate ceremony and language into all project stages.
- Support storytelling and healing through place-based, youth-led engagement.
- Foster continued dialogue and collaborative decision-making.

6. Conclusion

This summary reflects the powerful insights shared by Circle members on June 18, 2025. Their contributions underscore the importance of rooting heritage planning in respect, relationship, and reciprocity.

As the Junction HCD study progresses, this document will evolve with further input from Indigenous community members and Circle participants. By embedding Indigenous perspectives from the beginning, we not only honour the past but shape a future rooted in inclusivity and shared stewardship.