



Report to Council

Department: Office of the CAO
Division: Legal and Legislative Services
Date: June 7, 2021
Prepared by: Robert Auger, Town Solicitor/Clerk, and Matthew Ducharme, Legal & Legislative Services (Summer Student Intern)
Report Number: Legal and Legislative Services-2021-12
Subject: Land Acknowledgement Statement
Number of Pages: 7

Recommendation(s)

That Legal and Legislative Services 2021-012 entitled **"Land Acknowledgement Statement"** prepared by Robert Auger, Town Solicitor/Clerk and Matthew Ducharme, Legal & Legislative Services (Summer Student Intern) and dated June 7, 2021 be received;

That the Land Acknowledgement Statement noted below be provisionally adopted for a six (6) month trial period so as to allow for an additional period of time for Indigenous community members to provide feedback on the proposed statement:

"We acknowledge that this land is the traditional territory of the Three Fires Confederacy of First Nations (comprised of the Ojibway, the Odawa, and the Potawatomi Peoples), and of the Huron-Wendat Peoples. We value the significant historical and contemporary contributions of local and regional First Nations and all of the Original Peoples of Turtle Island who have been living and working on the land from time immemorial."

Further, that the Land Acknowledgement Statement noted in this Report be read at the beginning of all Regular Council Meetings and at other such special events as may be determined from time to time by the Mayor, and

That the Land Acknowledgement Statement noted be further placed on the website of the Town of Essex.

Purpose

A land acknowledgement is an act of reconciliation that involves making a statement recognizing the traditional territory of the Indigenous people who called the land home before the arrival of settlers, and the Indigenous people who still call the land home.

Background and Discussion

On April 19, 2021 at the Regular Council Meeting, Council passed the following motion:

(R21-04-159) “That Administration research and consult with local First Nations, indigenous organizations and other community champions in creating or developing a land acknowledgement statement for the Town of Essex.” “Carried”

Traditional land acknowledgement statements are increasingly being used across Canada by governments, schools, post-secondary institutions, non-governmental organizations, and other civil institutions as a practice of reconciliation aimed at recognizing the traditional or treaty territories of Indigenous peoples. The statements are typically made at the introduction of meetings, gatherings, events, or presentations. Some of the statements are featured on organization websites or event description pages.

Land acknowledgments are a historically accurate way to recognize the traditional First Nations, Métis and/or Inuit territories of a place. They commemorate Indigenous peoples’ principal kinship to the land and the fact that we have not and cannot be erased from her, our collective first mother.

Inspired by the 94 recommended calls to action contained in the 2015 Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (now known as the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, or NCTR), land acknowledgements are a necessary first step toward honouring the original occupants of a place. They also help Canadians recognize and respect Indigenous **peoples' inherent kinship beliefs** when it comes to the land, especially since those beliefs were restricted for so long.

In the development of the recommended statement, the *Guidance on Traditional Land Acknowledgement Statements* from the Association of Municipalities Ontario (AMO) was consulted. As the history of the land is complex and it has not been universally accepted amongst all the First Nations as to how best acknowledge the land, different sources may be contradictory. As such, AMO recommends municipalities opt for a more general statement rather than trying to be very specific.

AMO additionally recommends that land acknowledgement statements are not used superficially, without an appreciation for their cultural meaning. This report serves to provide that appreciation for the cultural meaning of the statement by providing a brief history of the land on which the Town of Essex is located as it is understood today. To provide the following brief history the following resources were further consulted, in addition to other materials from those listed as indirect consultations noted at the end of this report:

- National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation (NCTR)
- Map and History of Ontario Treaties and Reserves – Government of Ontario
- Aboriginal Education Centre, University of Windsor
- First Nations & Indigenous Studies, University of British Columbia
- The Canadian Encyclopedia

Brief History

At the time of European settlement, First Nations living within the boundaries of the Town of Essex as we now know them were the Three Fires Confederacy (comprised of the Ojibway, the Odawa, and the Potawatomi Peoples), and the Huron-Wendat Peoples.

To open the area between lakes Erie and St. Clair to settlement, the British colonial government asked an Indian agent at Detroit, Alexander McKee, to negotiate a treaty. The treaty, known as the McKee Purchase, or Treaty No. 2, was signed in 1790. The Ojibway, Odawa, Potawatomi, and Huron-Wendat signatories surrendered the majority of the land in the southwestern tip of what is now Ontario.

However, two tracts of land were left out of the McKee Purchase. One, known as the Huron Reserve, was located in the present-day towns of Amherstburg, LaSalle, and extending partially into of the Town of Essex (parts of Wards 2 & 3). In 1833, the Huron-Wendat living at the Huron Reserve surrendered their land through Treaty No. 35.

For Indigenous peoples, Turtle Island refers to the continent of North America. The name comes from various Indigenous oral histories that tell stories of a turtle that holds the world on its back. For some Indigenous peoples, the turtle is therefore considered an icon of life, and the story of Turtle Island consequently speaks to various spiritual and cultural beliefs.

The Town of Essex sits on Anishinabe Territory, represented today by Walpole Island First Nation. We are grateful to live and work on this land.

Reconciliation with Indigenous peoples is not a task of the past, but one we must continue today. The Residential schools were an extensive school system set up by the Canadian government and administered by churches that had the nominal objective of educating Indigenous children, but also the more damaging and equally explicit objectives of indoctrinating them into Euro-Canadian and Christian ways of living and assimilating them into mainstream white Canadian society. The residential school system officially operated from the 1880s until the last school closed in 1996.

Residential schools systematically undermined Indigenous, First Nations, Métis and Inuit cultures across Canada and disrupted families for generations, severing the ties through which Indigenous culture is taught and sustained, and contributing to a general loss of language and culture.

Recently, preliminary findings from a survey of the grounds at the former Kamloops Indian Residential School were released. According to the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation, the remains of 215 children buried at the site were uncovered. The National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation estimates about 4,100 children died at residential schools, based on death records, but has said the true total is likely much higher. This only highlights the great **“cultural genocide” that Indigenous peoples have faced for many years. Reconciliation is** needed now, and a Land Acknowledgement Statement for the Town of Essex while just a small part thereof, will help to continue the healing and reconciliation needed in Canada.

Administration reviewed a number of similar land acknowledgement statements in the drafting of this report and has made a recommendation that is specific to the Town of Essex, although similar to the statement used by the Essex Region Conservation Authority (ERCA).

Caldwell First Nation, Walpole Island First Nation, and Anishinabek Nation were contacted to ensure the land acknowledgement being recommended represents all lands in the Town of Essex. At this time, no response has been received in regards to feedback/further input on the proposed Land Acknowledgement. Therefore, part of the recommendations in this report is that the proposed Land Acknowledgment Statement be provisionally adopted for a six month period so as to allow for an additional appropriate period of time for such further consultations. At the end of such further consultation period, the proposed Land Acknowledgment Statement could be revised accordingly or adopted in its current form.

In the meantime it is recommended by Administration that the proposed Land Acknowledgement Statement be adopted provisionally and be read at the very beginning of Regular Council Meetings by the Mayor/Chair. It is also recommended that the proposed land acknowledgment could be read at the beginning of other Special Events as determined by the Mayor, and also be placed on the website of the Town of Essex. The purpose of this is to integrate the Land Acknowledgement Statement into the culture and fabric of the Town, as an act of continuing reconciliation.

Financial Impact

There is no financial impact.

Consultations

Shelley Brown, Deputy Clerk, Legal and Legislative Services

Alex Denonville, Manager, Strategic Communications

Russell Nahdee, Coordinator, Aboriginal Education Centre, University of Windsor

Kat Pasquach, Aboriginal Outreach and Retention Coordinator, University of Windsor

Indirect

Mary Birch, Director of Council and Community Services/Clerk, County of Essex

Tammy Fowkes, Deputy Clerk, Town of Amherstburg

Judy Smith, Director Municipal Governance/Clerk, Municipality of Chatham-Kent

Steve Vlachodimos, Deputy City Clerk & Senior Manager of Council Services, City of Windsor

Julia Burgess, Trustee, Greater Essex County District School Board

Nin.Da.Waab.Jib, Walpole Island Heritage Centre

Link to Strategic Priorities

- ☐ Manage, invest and plan for sustainable municipal infrastructure which meets current and future needs of the municipality and its citizens.
- ☒ Create a safe, friendly and inclusive community which encourages healthy, active living for people of all ages and abilities.
- ☐ Provide a fiscal stewardship and value for tax dollars to ensure long-term financial health to the municipality.
- ☐ Manage responsible and viable growth while preserving and enhancing the unique rural and small town character of the community.
- ☒ Improve the experiences of individuals, as both citizens and customers, in their interactions with the Town of Essex.
- ☐ **Improve the Town's capacity to meet the ongoing and future service needs of its citizens** while ensuring the corporation is resilient in the face of unanticipated changes or disruptions.

Report Approval Details

Document Title:	Land Acknowledgement Statement - Legal and Legislative Services-2021-12.docx
Attachments:	
Final Approval Date:	Jun 1, 2021

This report and all of its attachments were approved and signed as outlined below:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Chris Nepszy". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a period at the end.

Chris Nepszy, Chief Administrative Officer - Jun 1, 2021 - 5:06 PM