

For Information

REPORT TITLE: **Region of Peel Indigenous Land Acknowledgement**

FROM: Kathryn Lockyer, Interim Commissioner of Corporate Services

OBJECTIVE

To provide an update to the Diversity, Equity and Anti-Racism Committee about the practice of Indigenous Land Acknowledgements.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- Indigenous Land Acknowledgements have been practiced for thousands of years to recognize and respect the legal and spiritual relationship between Indigenous people and their lands.
 - Indigenous land acknowledgments have become common since the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 94 calls to action were released in 2015.
 - Indigenous Land Acknowledgements can be seen as tokenism when not delivered with genuine intent and when no further actions are taken toward reconciliation.
 - The Region of Peel continues to open all formal public proceedings with its current Indigenous Land Acknowledgement that includes recognition of the Huron-Wendat people.
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DISCUSSION

1. Background

What is a Land Acknowledgement?

A Land Acknowledgement is an historically accurate way to recognize and respect the legal and spiritual relationship between Indigenous peoples and their traditional territories. Land Acknowledgements can be presented verbally or visually, and honour the unique connection Indigenous people have to the land. It is imperative that Indigenous Land Acknowledgements are not simply a script that is adhered to and read at the start of events. There should be some personal introspection about the things we know, the things we don't know, and a commitment to increasing understanding about the injustices inflicted upon the Indigenous peoples both past and present.

Importance of Land Acknowledgements

Indigenous land acknowledgments have become common since the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 94 calls to action were released in 2015, urging all levels of government to make intentional efforts to repair the harm caused by residential schools.

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Within the context of reconciliation, land acknowledgements are an opportunity to acknowledge the injustices that have been carried out against Indigenous communities. They are an opportunity to recognize how institutional systems of power have oppressed Indigenous peoples, and how that oppression has influenced the way that non-Indigenous people think about Indigenous peoples.

Land acknowledgements can begin to sound empty when there is no appreciation of what they mean, and when no further actions are taken toward reconciliation. In this case, they become scripted statements on an agenda.

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On December 12, 2019, by Resolution 2019-1090, Regional Council approved and endorsed the Region of Peel's current Indigenous Land Acknowledgement (See Appendix I) to be read at all formal public proceedings conducted by the Region of Peel, in the geographic region known as Peel. This land acknowledgement was developed in consultation with local resources from the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation, the Ministry of Education – Indigenous Education office, Ontario Federation of Labour, Peel Aboriginal Network and University of Toronto.

2. Current Situation

Recently, there was concern expressed over the use of the term “Huron” when referencing “Huron-Wendat” people in the current Region of Peel Land Acknowledgement. The individual expressed that “Huron” carries historical significance as a derogatory term, originally used by European/French people.

Research and Consultation

Staff undertook a scan of land acknowledgements used in other municipalities and organizations, such as post-secondary institutions, government and non-government establishments. In some cases, the term “Huron” was removed, and in other cases it remained.

Staff also consulted with several parties including the Council of Inclusive Work Environments with the Conference Board of Canada, an Indigenous Knowledge Advisor with Fleming College and Maxime Picard, official representative of the Huron-Wendat Nation in Wendake, Quebec. Maxime Picard explained the name “Huron” from its historical origin over 400 years ago to its present-day identity. According to the Nation Huronne-Wendat, the term Huron is not considered negative or diminishing. On the contrary, it is part of their identity and inclusion of the word has been interpreted as a sign of respect and understanding of their peoples.

3. Beyond the Land Acknowledgement

The Region of Peel is taking actions toward reconciliation beyond its land acknowledgement. Examples include:

- Development of an organizational Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Learning Plan which prioritizes staff education on Indigenous culture, history and safety (anticipated launch 2021).

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- Indigenous communities remain a focus population within Peel Public Health's Health Equity Strategy.
- PAMA runs exhibits and events throughout the year that focus on Indigenous culture and history.
- Education and awareness promoted through events and observances such as Courageous Conversations, National Indigenous Day and Orange Shirt Day.

CONCLUSION

The Region of Peel will continue with its practice of opening all formal proceedings with its Indigenous Land Acknowledgement that includes recognition of the Huron-Wendat people.

APPENDICES

Appendix I – Region of Peel Indigenous Land Acknowledgement

For further information regarding this report, please contact Juliet Jackson, Director – Office of Culture & Inclusion, Ext. 6741, Juliet.jackson@peelregion.ca.

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Reviewed and/or approved in workflow by:

Department Commissioner and Division Director.

Final approval is by the Chief Administrative Officer.



J. Baker, Chief Administrative Officer