

# The City of Saint John – Truth and Reconciliation **A Conceptual Framework**

## **Background**

Residential schools were a policy developed under the authority of a federal law called the Indian Act. Residential schools were first created in 1886 and the last one closed in 1997. Following the closure of the final residential school, the survivors of residential schools sued the Government of Canada in the largest class action lawsuit in Canadian history. The Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement (“IRSSA”) was reached between Residential Schools Survivors, the Assembly of First Nations, Inuit representatives and the parties responsible for the creation and operation of the schools: the federal government and church bodies.

As a part of the IRSSA, 60 million dollars were set aside for the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (“TRC”). The TRC carried out extensive research and heard from residential school survivors, their families, and members of their communities. The result was the TRC Final Report released in 2015 and which found that the use of residential schools resulted in a complete disruption to Indigenous communities, on-going and intergenerational trauma, the loss of language and cultural practices, poverty, a disproportionate rate of incarceration of Indigenous people, and hundreds of missing and murdered Indigenous women.

The TRC Final Report included 94 Calls to Action which appeal to all levels of government, organizations, and individuals to make concrete changes in society.

## **Calls to Action Directed at Municipalities**

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We call upon federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal governments to fully adopt and implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as the framework for reconciliation

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We call upon federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal governments to repudiate concepts used to justify European sovereignty over Indigenous peoples and lands, such as the Doctrine of Discovery and terra nullius, and to reform those laws, government policies and litigation strategies that continue to rely on such concepts

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We call upon federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal governments to provide education to public servants on the history of Aboriginal peoples, including the history and legacy of residential schools, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Treaties and Aboriginal rights, Indigenous law and Aboriginal-Crown relations. This will require skills-based training in intercultural competency, conflict resolution, human rights, and anti-racism.

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We call upon the federal government to work with provincial, territorial, and municipal governments, churches, Aboriginal communities, former residential school students, and current landowners to develop and implement strategies and procedures for the ongoing identification, documentation, maintenance, commemoration, and protection of residential school cemeteries or other sites at which residential school children were buried. This is to include the provision of appropriate memorial ceremonies and commemorative markers to honour the deceased children.

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We call upon provincial, territorial, municipal, and community archives to work collaboratively with the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation to identify and collect copies of all records relevant to the history and legacy of the residential school system, and to provide these to the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation.

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## **Steps Taken To Date By The City of Saint John**

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✚ At the Council meeting held on March 22, 2021, Council expressed a desire to include an appropriate recognition of Indigenous People during Council meetings.

✚ On June 14, 2021, The City of Saint John heard a land acknowledgment read for the first time at a Council meeting. The land acknowledgment was a product of consultation with Indigenous partners and, with great gratitude, was delivered by the Honourable Graydon Nicholas.

✚ The City is working with the Province to rename the community known as “Indiantown” in the City’s Old North End. Consultation with Indigenous communities is anticipated in this process.

✚ Fostering relationships with Indigenous stakeholders, including a strong working relationship with Eastern Circle.

✚ GCO staff visited the Elsipogtog Healing to Wellness Court on September 22, 2021, and were honoured to be able to sit down and speak with one of the Elders of that community. The learning from this experience will inform the City’s long-term approach to Truth and Reconciliation.

✚ An employee campaign of daily “Truth and Reconciliation” moments were sent to all City Staff leading up to the first official Day of Truth and Reconciliation on September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2021.

✚ A Truth and Reconciliation Working Group has been established with a mandate to coordinate Truth and Reconciliation efforts in the City.

✚ The dedication of two crosswalks featuring seven (7) white feathers painted on an orange background. The seven feathers represent the Seven Grandfather Teachings recognized by many Indigenous communities in Canada: love, respect, courage, honesty, humility, truth, and wisdom.



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### Truth

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The work of Truth and Reconciliation must take a measured pace that gives appropriate weight to, first, Truth and then, Reconciliation.

#### Truth

*Many non-Indigenous Canadians have limited knowledge of the realities of colonization – of assimilation and denial - and the impact on Indigenous cultures. As such, a critical component of the Truth phase is to continue learning with an open heart and mind.*

Engaging with the “Truth” will require education and training directed at both elected officials and staff and will give effect to Call to Action #57. Training and education opportunities currently planned include:

Our Goal is to advance efforts directed toward Truth and Reconciliation with Indigenous people, with diligence, patience, consultation, respect, and care.

- ✚ Participation in a “Blanket Exercise” by Council Members and members of the Senior Leadership Team;
- ✚ A four-part program delivered by Mi'gmawe'l Tplu'taqnn Inc commencing in November 2021 to Members of Council and the Senior Leadership Team;
- ✚ Presentation from and discussion with Connecting to the Land (delayed due to COVID-19); and
- ✚ “The Path: Your Journey Through Indigenous Canada”, a course directed at Indigenous Cultural Awareness to be rolled out to Management and Professional Staff in 2022.

**It is critical to pause on the *Truth* aspect of Truth and Reconciliation.**

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### Reconciliation

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#### Reconciliation – *a rapprochement*

#### A note on consultation:

Consultation is most appropriate as between the Mayor and Members of Council and senior leaders in Indigenous communities – in addition to communication actively taking place between City Staff and Indigenous citizens of our City, Province and Country.

More work is required to ensure that there are well established channels between Members of Council and Indigenous Leaders and Elders in our Province.

*Reconciliation requires a drawing nearer of all parties, and it requires healing. Action is essential. Symbolic actions may bring significant progress but will not alone suffice. The work of Reconciliation must be slow, thoughtful, and thought-provoking, with the applicable Calls to Action – and the broader framework – as a guide.*

In the coming year, as a starting point, and leading up to the next National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, September 30, 2022, City Staff plans to:

- ✚ Create a database, track, and report periodically on activities already underway to support implementation of Truth and Reconciliation initiatives;
- ✚ Explore the creation of a Truth and Reconciliation page on the City’s website to promote the City’s efforts, facilitate feedback, and enhance the relationship between the local Indigenous and non-Indigenous community members;
- ✚ Hold engagement sessions with each department within the City to canvass the existing knowledge and educational needs of the City’s senior leadership and staff;
- ✚ Following consultation by Council with Indigenous leaders and the New Brunswick Council of Aboriginal People, explore the City hosting a series of engagement sessions for the public to provide feedback on the process of Truth and Reconciliation in the City;
- ✚ Outreach to the Chief and Council of all First Nations in New Brunswick and the New Brunswick Aboriginal Peoples Council; and
- ✚ Periodically report to Council on Progress.



Kent Monkman, "The Scream" (2017)

***"Truth is hard. Reconciliation is harder."***

**- Commissioner Murray Sinclair**

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### Reconciliation – continued

In these early days of Truth-seeking, progress may appear modest. However, pursuing Truth through four seasons with an open heart and planning for Reconciliation activities in consultation with Indigenous leaders and Elders will pave the way for a strong start.

The City's efforts on Truth and Reconciliation are not a project to complete. As consultation takes place and the City continues to learn, more initiatives will emerge. The City's commitment is to create an environment where Reconciliation is actively fostered and becomes an integral part of its day-to-day thinking and actions.



Mayor Donna Noade Reardon walks with Todd Ross, Indigenous Student Advisor with UNB Saint John, across one of the newly dedicated crosswalks in front of City Hall.