



## STAFF REPORT

**Title:** Bylaw No. 653-BD-19 - Procedure Bylaw Amendment for Indigenous Land Acknowledgment

**Meeting Date:** November 3, 2021

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### **Executive Summary:**

A Land Acknowledgement can be described as “a formal statement recognizing the unique and enduring relationship that exists between indigenous peoples and their traditional territories” (University of Toronto). Land acknowledgments have been implemented by public and private organizations, including governments across Canada largely over the last decade as one way to formalize the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada’s final report which included 94 Calls to Action.

The City of Cold Lake Bylaw No. 653-BD-19 regulates the procedure and conduct at meetings of Council and committees established by Council. The report is provided to initiate a discussion and solicit Council’s feedback in relation to amending Bylaw No. 653-BD-19 to include a land acknowledgment which could be incorporated at the beginning of Council and/or Committee meetings.

Based on the background information of this report, the following is a draft land acknowledgment framework for Council’s review:

*“In the spirit of respect and reciprocity, we acknowledge that the City of Cold Lake is located on lands and by water in Treaty 6 Territory and the homeland of the Metis Nation that has been, and continues to be, a sacred place for many. We pay respect to the indigenous peoples of this place past and present: the Cree, Denesuline and Metis peoples. We acknowledge that this place is impacted by the ongoing process of colonialism. We strive to understand and reframe our responsibilities to land and community as we journey towards reconciliation.”*

Further to the above, administration recommends the Council review the various land acknowledgment statements of various municipalities and government organizations included as an attachment to this report.



**Background:**  
**2017 Proposed Land Acknowledgment**

In 2017, City Council considered implementing a Land Acknowledgement through an amendment to Bylaw No. 308-BD-07, Procedure Bylaw, the proposed amendment was ultimately defeated at first reading:

- At the March 28, 2017 regular meeting of Council, Councillor MacDonald provided a “Notice of Motion” for the April 25, 2017 meeting, with the following specific motion for consideration: ““That Council pass a motion directing Administration to prepare a bylaw amendment to the City of Cold Lake’s Procedural Bylaw No. 308-BD-07 for Council and Council Committees, in order to acknowledge the fact that the City of Cold Lake is meeting on or within Treaty 6 Territory at the outset of any meeting of the City of Cold Lake’s Council.””
- At the June 27, 2017 regular meeting of Council (following two postponements of the item), it was moved by Councillor MacDonald that Council direct Administration to prepare a bylaw amendment to City of Cold Lake Procedural Bylaw No. 308-BD-07 for the Chair to acknowledge the fact that the City of Cold Lake is meeting on or within Treaty 6 and Metis Territory at the outset of any meeting of the City of Cold Lake’s Council (i.e. *We acknowledge that we are on Treaty 6 territory, a traditional meeting grounds, gathering place, and travelling route to the Cree, Saulteaux, Blackfoot, Metis, Dene, and Nakota Sioux. We acknowledge all the many First Nations, Metis, and Inuit whose footsteps have marked these lands for centuries.*). The motion was carried.
- At the July 11, 2017 regular meeting of Council, it was moved by Councillor Lefebvre that Bylaw No. 610-BD-17, being a Bylaw to Amend City of Cold Lake Procedural Bylaw No. 308-BD-07, in the City of Cold Lake, be given first reading. The motion was defeated.

*(Attached, Minutes and Summary Report)*

**History of Land Acknowledgments**

In June 2008, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was established as one of the requirements of the legal settlement between Residential School Survivors, the Assembly of First Nations, Inuit representatives, the Government of Canada and churches. The purpose of the TRC – to inform all Canadians of what happened in



residential schools – was achieved through extensive research and hearing from the parties involved in residential schools including survivors, their families and communities.

In 2015, The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's final report "called on governments, educational and religious institutions, civil society groups and all Canadians to take action on the 94 Calls to Action identified" (Government of Canada; TRC 94 Calls to Act are attached).

The TRC Final Report, Summary includes the following statement:

*Getting to the truth was hard, but getting to reconciliation will be harder. It requires that the paternalistic and racist foundations of the residential school system be rejected as the basis for an ongoing relationship. Reconciliation requires that a new vision, based on a commitment to mutual respect, be developed. It also requires an understanding that the most harmful impacts of residential schools have been the loss of pride and self-respect of Aboriginal people, and the lack of respect that non-Aboriginal people have been raised to have for their Aboriginal neighbours. Reconciliation is not an Aboriginal problem; it is a Canadian one. Virtually all aspects of Canadian society may need to be reconsidered.*

Following the TRC final report, there have been a growing number of organizations, including municipalities, that have implemented Land Acknowledgements at the beginning of public speaking engagements, events and meetings. The introduction of Land Acknowledgements have been seen as one way to formalize the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's final report which included 94 Calls to Action. A Land Acknowledgement can be described as "a formal statement recognizing the unique and enduring relationship that exists between indigenous peoples and their traditional territories" (University of Toronto [Land Acknowledgement | Indigenous University of Toronto \(utoronto.ca\)](https://www.utoronto.ca/land-acknowledgement)).

The value of Land Acknowledgements can be explained as:

*Acknowledging the land is an Indigenous protocol used to express gratitude to those who reside here, and to honour the Indigenous people who have lived and worked on this land historically and presently. It allows us the opportunity to appreciate the unique role and relationship that each of us has with the land, and provides a gentle reminder of the broader perspectives that expand our understanding to encompass the*



*long-standing, rich history of the land, and our privileged role in residing here.*

*To recognize the land is an expression of gratitude and appreciation to those whose territory you reside on, and a way of honouring the Indigenous people who have been living and working on the land from time immemorial. It is important to understand the long-standing history that has brought you to reside on the land, and to seek to understand your place within that history. Land acknowledgements do not exist in a past tense, or historical context: colonialism is a current ongoing process, and we need to build our mindfulness of our present participation. It is also worth noting that acknowledging the land is Indigenous protocol. (University of Toronto)*

The University of Saskatchewan describes the lengthy history indigenous peoples have of making land acknowledgments, and further describes the value of a Land Acknowledgement as being a means of reconciliation:

*It has been a way for visitors to a land to demonstrate and pay homage to the First Nations people you are engaging. It recognizes the strength and wisdom of the place that has given rise to the people who are of that land and it invokes the spirit of that place to support your good intentions. By recognizing the intimate relationship between the place and people, you are demonstrating that you understand what is important and that you are trustworthy. **To do this, you must use your own voice and provide the Land Acknowledgement from your heart.***

There has also been some questions and criticisms about the value of Land Acknowledgements being “superficial platitudes meant to give the illusion of honour and respect for indigenous land and nations” (February 27, 2019, “Questioning the usefulness of land acknowledgements,” APTN News). Further criticism has described some Land Acknowledgements as “a politically correct and empty protocol for some people” (University of Saskatchewan [Land Acknowledgements - Teaching and Learning - University of Saskatchewan \(usask.ca\)](https://www.usask.ca/land-acknowledgements/)). The main concern that has been raised over the last few years is land acknowledgements being too generic and broad, devoid of specific connection to the community that they relate to and earnest intent to show respect for the purpose that the land acknowledgement serves – reconciliation with indigenous peoples.

There are several recommendations from the University of Saskatchewan to ensure Land Acknowledgements are more than an empty statement and do not fall short



(University of Saskatchewan [Land Acknowledgements - Teaching and Learning - University of Saskatchewan \(usask.ca\)](#); Native Governance Center [A guide to Indigenous land acknowledgment - Native Governance Center](#)):

- **Self Reflection:** “Each one of us is born and raised within a culture that has shaped our view of the world. To truly understand this protocol and how to deliver it with integrity and conviction, one must be cognizant of how you want to approach the Land Acknowledgement in relation to how Indigenous Peoples have been using it.”
  - “Why am I doing this land acknowledgement?”
  - “What is my end goal?”
  - “When will I have the largest impact?”
- **Historical Perspectives:** “We recommend everyone heed the unwritten declaration of the TRC to know the Truth before you engage in Reconciliation. So many people are excited to get involved, to take meaningful steps toward a better future for all, but especially for Indigenous people.”
  - The acknowledgement should be about the land and the indigenous people.
  - Reference to the indigenous people who have been, and continue to reside on the land, needs to be accurate in reference to the specific indigenous people who were in the territory.
- **Reconciliation:** The recognition of indigenous land and people needs to be tied to a larger context around reconciliation, colonialism to connect the acknowledgement with the purpose it intends to serve. “Land acknowledgements do not exist in past tense, or historical context: colonialism is a current ongoing process, and we need to build our mindfulness of present participation” (Northwestern University).
  - Recognize that indigenous people are still here; context should not just be historical.
  - Land acknowledgements can celebrate indigenous communities.

### **City of Cold Lake – Land Acknowledgment**

The intention is to balance need for a succinct and clear statement, while avoiding the criticisms of an empty statement that is too generic and sterile to serve the underlying purposes of doing a land acknowledgment.

The approach that has been taken in drafting a proposed land acknowledgment is to incorporate three things, in accordance with best practices:

- (1) **recognize the land;**
- (2) **recognize the indigenous people, and**
- (3) **address reconciliation.**



Each of these is addressed in a short sentence, which together include the elements of a respectful land acknowledgement:

Three component parts of a proposed land acknowledgement for the City of Cold Lake	
<b>Recognize the Land</b>	In the spirit of respect and reciprocity, we acknowledge that the City of Cold Lake is located on lands and by water in Treaty 6 Territory and the homeland of the Metis Nation that has been, and continues to be, a sacred place for many.
<b>Recognize the Indigenous People</b>	We pay respect to the indigenous peoples of this place past and present: the Cree, Denesuline and Metis peoples.
<b>Address Reconciliation</b>	We acknowledge that this place is impacted by the ongoing process of colonialism. We strive to understand and reframe our responsibilities to land and community as we journey towards reconciliation.

The proposed three component parts would together form the Land Acknowledgement for the City of Cold Lake:

*“In the spirit of respect and reciprocity, we acknowledge that the City of Cold Lake is located on lands and by water in Treaty 6 Territory and the homeland of the Metis Nation that has been, and continues to be, a sacred place for many. We pay respect to the indigenous peoples of this place past and present: the Cree, Denesuline and Metis peoples. We acknowledge that this place is impacted by the ongoing process of colonialism. We strive to understand and reframe our responsibilities to land and community as we journey towards reconciliation.”*

### **Discussions with indigenous communities in Cold Lake**

At this point, no discussions have been initiated with the local indigenous communities in relation to implementation of a land acknowledgement or specific wording thereof. We can also confirm that the local indigenous communities have not formally reached out specifically requesting the City to implement land acknowledgement.

It is administration advice that this initiative should be the municipality’s voice and on behalf of the community and its residents.

That being said, Council may wish to consider directing administration to initiate discussions with the local indigenous communities for their input and feedback on a proposed land acknowledgment prior to implementation inclusive of Cold Lake First Nation and Metis Nation of Alberta Region 2.



**Alternatives:**

Corporate Priorities Committee of Council may consider the following options:

1. Accept the report as information only;
2. That the Corporate Priorities Committee of Council recommend that Council enact an indigenous land acknowledgement protocol for all formal meeting of Council by amendments to the City Procedure Bylaw No. 653-BD-19.
3. That the Corporate Priorities Committee of Council direct administration discussions with the local indigenous communities for their input and feedback on a proposed land acknowledgment prior to implementation inclusive of Cold Lake First Nation and Metis Nation of Alberta Region 2. (The issue would return to the CPC in either December 2021 or January 2022).

**Recommended Action:**

That the Corporate Priorities Committee of Council recommend that Council enact an indigenous land acknowledgement protocol for all formal meetings of Council by amending Bylaw No. 653-BD-19 being the Procedure Bylaw.

**Budget Implications (Yes or No):**

No

**Submitted by:**

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