

# Truth and Reconciliation Commemoration Update

## Recommendation:

That the June 29, 2015, Community Services Committee report CR\_1767, be received for information.

## Report Summary

**This report provides information on the progress of City Council's commitment to commemorate the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 2014 Alberta National Event.**

## Previous Council/Committee Action

At the October 15, 2014, Community Services Committee Meeting, the following motion was passed:

That Administration conduct informal consultation with the Edmonton Arts Council, the aboriginal community, faith communities, and other concerned stakeholders to gauge their feelings toward an appropriate commemoration of the Truth and Reconciliation of Canada's Alberta National Event, and provide a report to Community Services Committee in the first quarter of 2015.

## Report

### Background

- Edmonton was chosen by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to host its final national gathering in March 2014.
- In recognition of this historic event, City Council directed that up to \$200,000 be allocated to commemorate the significance of the Truth and Reconciliation of Canada's Alberta National Event.
- In early 2015, Mayor D. Iveson invited the Province to participate in this initiative, and to match City Council's financial commitment. At the time of the writing of this report, no official response has been received.
- On June 2, 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada released its report which includes 94 "Calls to Action" or recommendations. A section dedicated to "Commemoration" speaks to the creation of a Residential Schools Monument in each capital city to honour survivors and their families. Further acknowledgment of the Truth and Reconciliation through commemoration would align with the recently released report.
- Much of the work completed to date on this project has revolved around the process of determining a commemoration which furthers reconciliation versus creating unintended divisiveness in the communities. The complexity of the project is such that many of the "traditional" methods of public engagement and a

public art call may have to be modified because they do not address cultural sensitivities appropriate within this context.

### Engagement To Date

#### 1. *Community Learnings: Building upon Synergies and Engagements with Community*

- The City of Edmonton's Aboriginal Relations Office and the Edmonton Arts Council, are currently engaged in various initiatives and projects which interface with Aboriginal artists and communities. These in-progress engagements provide the opportunity to leverage existing relationships and gather feedback on the commemorative project.
- Projects such as the Queen Elizabeth Park Redevelopment - Aboriginal Art Park, Aboriginal Initiatives Committee of the Edmonton Arts Council and the Western Canadian Aboriginal Art Summit have provided opportunities for dialogue. To date, general themes and feedback applicable to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission commemoration include:
  - Youth involvement - work with schools, and have young people explain how they have been impacted by the Truth and Reconciliation Event in Edmonton.
  - Involve Elders and survivors ensuring that young people are connected with the older generations.
  - Reach out to other individuals who feel they are not often included in these types of initiatives.
  - Recognize a diversity of experiences from the Indian Residential Schools system.
- Engagement and relationship building continues with many groups in the community. There are growing sentiments that this could be a youth driven project transitioning the "Year of Reconciliation" into a "Reconcili-ACTION" initiative as part of ongoing efforts with civic engagement and leadership for Aboriginal youth.

#### 2. *Research and Industry Wise Practices - Stronger than Stone Symposium November 21-24, 2014*

- *Stronger Than Stone: (Re)Inventing the Indigenous Monument* was an Indigenous Art Symposium that occurred in two cities, Calgary and Saskatoon, on November 21-24, 2014.
- This symposium brought together Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal speakers to deliver presentations and to engage in a dialogue about land, language and the creation of public sites of memory. Delegates included Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal artists, academics and art administrators, as well as federal, provincial, and municipal arts funders and administrators.
- The proceedings included wise practices for the commissioning of public art, urban design projects and community-led artworks – including memorials and monuments – as they have the power to renew or reinvent relationships between people, land and place, and cultural memory/histories.

- Major themes from the symposium included:
  - Recognition that monuments are a product of their time, and they call for investigation and exploration of meaning and why they exist. Society should be aware that past monuments and the use of non-Indigenous knowledge systems to create meaning and stories in this space, without the involvement of Aboriginal peoples (through consultation, collaboration, or partnership), may be deemed, at times, as a form of cultural appropriation.
  - Indigenous symbols, methods, and interpretations must be made visible - a monument must recognize that there is an Indigenous presence and nature to the land. Commemoration should provide context, but cannot necessarily repair relationships or recover something lost. A monument should be respectful of the territory in which it resides, yet also acknowledge that no territory is isolated and that there is a long history of sharing knowledge and space.
  - A commemoration is an institutionally sanctioned “memory,” but that memory in itself is very subjective. There is a power in monuments to produce and tell some stories while erasing others. It then becomes key to collaborate with communities and build a robust engagement process throughout the entire project's development.

### 3. *Case Study Learnings; the Grandin Station Murals Project*

- In September 2011, concerns were raised about the problematic nature of a mural depicting Residential Schools in the Grandin LRT station. The mural did not reflect the true experience of Aboriginal children raised in that system.
- The Aboriginal Relations Office took action to address the concerns by bringing together Aboriginal community members; the Francophonie Jeunesse de l'Alberta (FJA), which commissioned and installed the art in 1989; the Edmonton Arts Council; the original artist, Sylvie Nadeau; the original complainants; University of Alberta staff; and Edmonton Transit staff. These participants formed a “Working Circle” that met bi-monthly to discuss the murals and future steps to take. Attachment 1 provides further background on the group's journey to create the project.
- Learnings from this project can be summarized as:
  - The project itself became an example of a journey toward reconciliation. A significant investment of time was spent working with Elders, bridging world views and various systemic structures, and brokering understanding and building commitment by all involved.
  - The group co-created and took a developmental approach in discovering a process that would work for all stakeholders. There was a shared purpose in mind, but at first no consensus on how to address the original mural. In the end, a shared vision was created, and it became the uniqueness of the whole experience for all parties involved which created two murals. The new murals became an expression or output of their reconciliation journey.

- On this type of journey, comfort zones will be stretched and paradigms of thinking critiqued - creating safe spaces for dialogue is paramount to success.

#### 4. *Informal Online Survey*

- Administration took the opportunity to gather additional information at some key community events in the form of an online survey where participants were asked a number of questions with regards to this initiative. Results of the survey demonstrate the diversity of perspectives and complexity of how advancing a commemoration project should involve a broad scope of people.
  - In March, youth were engaged through the Journey to Reconciliation Education Conference which had over 600 attendees from schools in Edmonton Public and Edmonton Catholic School districts as well as the various post-secondary institutions.
  - In April, Enterprise Edmonton hosted the Walrus Talks: An Aboriginal City. At this event, ideas of design, urbanism, reconciliation and other current themes intersected and were discussed by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal leaders. Over 800 attendees received invitations to participate in the online survey.
  - In May, the Edmonton Arts Council hosted a symposium which focused on Western Canadian Aboriginal Arts. The engagement of local artists and administrators occurred, and Administration was able to ask another 100 people to provide input.
  - Finally, engagements with faith communities were initiated via the Edmonton Ecumenical Working Committee. This group is involved with local Truth and Reconciliation initiatives in Edmonton and supported efforts at the Alberta National Event.
- To date, the respondents of the survey have largely agreed that the City of Edmonton should commemorate the Truth and Reconciliation Commission through public art or a monument (89 percent). Those who disagreed suggested that a monument might indicate that “reconciliation is complete” when in fact reconciliation is seen as an ongoing process. (Attachment 2 and 3).

#### Moving Forward and Future Steps

- With learnings from these opportunities in 2015, the formalization of a project “Working Circle” in the fall of 2015 will begin project consultation and implementation with anticipated project completion in 2017.
- This will also allow for additional time for the Province to provide its official response. Administration will prepare an update on the progress in the first quarter of 2016 via the Council Initiatives Update within the “Indigenous Peoples Strategy.”

### **Budget/Financial Implications**

Funding of \$200,000 was made available from Council Contingency in 2014. At the March 3, 2015, meeting of City Council, \$200,000 was approved for carry forward as part of the recommendations approved with the December 2014 Preliminary Year End Financial Results - Operating, and is appropriated in the Financial Stabilization Reserve. As part of the reporting for the 2015 Year End Financial Results, a carry forward will be requested for any unused funds in order to advance the project with the anticipated project completion.

### **Attachments**

1. Grandin Station Murals Backgrounder
2. Truth and Reconciliation Commission Commemoration Survey - Summary Results
3. Truth and Reconciliation National Event Commemoration Survey

### **Others Reviewing this Report**

- T. Burge, Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer