



Wahigicicobi
Indigenous Framework

**2023 November Community
Check-in Sessions**

WHAT WE HEARD REPORT

edmonton.ca/indigenousframework



LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The City of Edmonton acknowledges the traditional land on which we reside is in Treaty 6 territory. We honour the diverse Indigenous Peoples whose ancestors footsteps have marked this territory for centuries, such as the nêhiyawak (Cree), Dene, Anishinaabe (Saulteaux), Nakota Isga (Nakota Sioux) and Niitsitapi (Blackfoot) peoples. We also acknowledge this as the Métis' homeland and home of one of the largest communities of Inuit south of the 60th parallel. It is a welcoming place for all peoples who come from around the world to share Edmonton as a home. Together we call upon all of our collective, honoured traditions and spirits to work in building a great city for today and future generations.



A digital image of artist Dawn Marie Marchand's mixed media painting *City as an Advocate*, which also appear on the cover page.

Background

The Indigenous Framework was built on years of dialogue with Indigenous communities, including formal and informal relationships with Indigenous Elders, Knowledge Holders and youth. This process also involved research as well as discussions with service providers, academics and both municipal and community leaders. Approved by Edmonton City Council in February 2021, this important work is intended to answer the question:



pisiskapahtam by Lana Whiskeyjack.

“How can the City of Edmonton best support and build strong relationships with Indigenous Peoples in Edmonton?”

Building and nurturing strong kinship relationships with Indigenous community members, partners and City of Edmonton staff is of utmost importance in laying a solid foundation for the successful implementation and long-term sustainability of the Indigenous Framework. Wahigicobi (wah-hee-gee-chee-cho-bee), a lethka Nakoda word meaning “kinship relationships,” is the name gifted to the Indigenous Framework by Indigenous Elders during its development to guide this process.

Understanding the teachings of Wahigicobi, which includes our interconnected relationships with Mother Earth and all beings, allows the City of Edmonton to reimagine our connection to Indigenous Peoples, and requires a shift in the way we view relationships. As we continue to strengthen these connections, we also commit to continuously learning about the teachings of Wahigicobi and related concepts.

The Indigenous Framework outlines four roles — listener, connector, partner and advocate — and seven commitments guiding City of Edmonton action teams who implement the framework throughout municipal departments. Commitment No. 7 involves ensuring Indigenous Peoples are informed and engaged in City of Edmonton efforts related to the Indigenous Framework.

Community check-in sessions are vital for fostering trust and open relationships with Indigenous community members, partners and municipal staff involved with the Indigenous Framework. These annual sessions allow the City of Edmonton to receive feedback, demonstrate accountability and reaffirm our commitment to reconciliation.

What We Did



The Indigenous Framework Corporate Action Team, which includes chairpersons from each corresponding department action team, organized half-day community check-in sessions on November 3 and 24, 2023. Indigenous community members, partners and organizations attended to discuss departmental efforts to implement the framework in 2023.

Participants engage in a conversation cafe during a check-in session at Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society.

The meetings were hosted at Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society and the Commonwealth Community Recreation Centre. The events began with a smudge and prayer led by members of the Indigenous Framework Circle of Elders. Mayor Amarjeet Sohi and Councillor Aaron Paquette also attended to extend greetings on behalf of Edmonton City Council. In total, 44 community members and partners participated in the November check-in sessions.



Coun. Aaron Paquette (left) joins in a check-in session at Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society.

Wahigicobi Indigenous Framework
2023 WHAT WE HEARD REPORT

Six Indigenous Framework department action teams representing each City of Edmonton department delivered [presentations](#) on their efforts to implement the Indigenous Framework in 2023.

Attendees then participated in a “conversation cafe” led by facilitators at each presentation table to collect valuable feedback through focused discussions. Most community members joined three presentation and conversation sessions during each event.

Department Action Team Presentation Topics

- **Community Services**
 - *Smudging access in recreation facilities*
 - *Integrating winter counts, a traditional Indigenous documenting practice*
- **City Operations**
 - *Strengthening awareness through education*
 - *Supporting Indigenous arts, culture and events*
- **Employee and Legal Services**
 - *Developing staff education and policies to enhance Indigenous awareness*
 - *Understanding and supporting Indigenous employee experiences*
- **Financial and Corporate Services**
 - *Supporting Indigenous evacuees during the 2023 wildfire season*
 - *Partnering with First Nation leadership to better share and manage data*
- **Integrated Infrastructure Services**
 - *Integrating kinship, Indigenous knowledge practices and culture in infrastructure projects*
- **Urban Planning and Economy**
 - *Strengthening awareness through education by supporting cross-departmental learning opportunities and interactive tools*

Following presentations, facilitators used three questions to generate conversations among participants on each department’s efforts to enact Indigenous Framework roles and commitments:

- What questions or comments do you have on the presentation?
- Where do you see the City of Edmonton making progress on our commitment to reconciliation?
- Where do you see opportunities to improve our efforts to build relationships, implement the framework or enact the four roles?



Check-in participants engage in discussion at Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society.

What We Heard

After carefully collecting and reviewing community feedback from both November sessions, several key themes emerged. This report attempts to reflect community questions and comments on each of the identified themes.

The feedback from these check-in sessions will guide the development of subsequent Indigenous Framework action plans. Links to supplemental information and resources concerning the discussion topics are available in the [Appendix](#), while notes of the questions and comments facilitators collected during these sessions are available [here](#).

Housing and Houselessness

Check-in participants posed several questions about support and solutions for the growing number of Edmontonians experiencing houselessness. Some asked about the City of Edmonton's process for engaging these residents, and our ability to explore avenues for addressing their needs, such as using existing infrastructure and vacant buildings to provide housing or safe spaces, as well as providing permanent public washrooms and bathrooms Downtown.

"The situation is getting worse."

"We need to have housing for all."

Feedback highlighted the importance of using municipal processes and policies to offer proactive support for vulnerable Edmontonians, and the need to consider the complex and interrelated consequences connected to the absence of aid, such as addiction and houselessness.

Discussions also touched upon the discrimination that equity-deserving groups can face in education and health-care systems, but also from city residents opposed to affordable housing developments in their neighbourhoods.

Connecting with Indigenous Communities

Check-in participants asked for clarity about the City of Edmonton's efforts to connect, communicate and engage with Indigenous community members. These questions sought details on efforts to evaluate and improve consultation with Indigenous communities, and asked us to consider different ways of gathering.



City employees join community members for a check-in session at Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society.

“The sun, moon, stars, trees and wind – they all teach us.”

Discussions also touched upon the function of signs and monuments, and their role in signalling city values. Some expressed interest in seeing local monuments to truth and reconciliation, and to honour missing and murdered Indigenous relatives. Participants suggested Edmonton’s welcome signs acknowledge that the city is located on Treaty 6 territory and the Métis homeland. However, feedback also included the sentiment that Inuit people feel as if they do not fit in relative to the influence of First Nations and Métis peoples.

Elder Protocol

On the topic of seeking assistance from Indigenous Elders, participants discussed the purpose of these interactions and the importance of protocol. Feedback noted that engaging an Indigenous Elder for help requires an offer of protocol as well as a gift that is commensurate with the nature of the request. For example, facilitators heard that a complex request may require a larger gift such as moose or deer hide, but given in the spirit of reciprocation, and not as a transaction.



Elder Tom Snow participates in a check-in session at Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society.

Additionally, responses urged the City of Edmonton to understand the roles, qualities and attributes that define Indigenous Elders, as well as appropriate means for compensation. Suggestions included decolonizing interactions with Elders, such as forgoing the collection of social insurance numbers for honorariums, which should be paid in cash as opposed to other methods.

Urban Reserves

Conversations about urban reserves saw more questions than comments as participants sought to understand details surrounding the creation, governance and operation of these areas. Urban reserves are expansions to First Nation reserve land within or adjacent to an urban centre. Participants asked about the land requirements, the nature of the federal government’s involvement and whether the application process extended to all Indigenous Peoples.

“We need to honour the Earth, so that the Earth can look after us.”

Discussions saw inquiries about the City of Edmonton’s role in the creation of urban reserves, and the party or parties responsible for providing services and utilities. Additional

questions concerned the involvement of ceremony in the process of creating urban reserves, as well as protocols and processes for managing archeological deposits found on building and development sites.

Youth

In light of recent statistics showing that the Indigenous population in Canada is younger on average than the non-Indigenous population overall, participant feedback urged the City of Edmonton to give special consideration to the needs of Indigenous youth, compared to the greater Indigenous community, when developing programs and services. Feedback also noted that Indigenous youth should be involved in decisions affecting them.

Participants asked how the municipality could support Indigenous students, and pointed to a need for better transportation options for learners traveling to Edmonton from outside the city. Additionally, facilitators heard that the cost of Downtown parking is prohibitive for youth.



An Edmonton firefighter stands with Indigenous youth participants for the inaugural Miyowatsiwin Camp Inspire in June 2023.

Ceremonial Sites and Medicines

As with urban reserves, participants were curious about kihcihkaw askî-Sacred Land, a ceremonial site that recently opened near Whitemud Park. Facilitators heard questions about the process for booking ceremonies such as sweat lodges, access for Indigenous Elders and the availability of medicines. Participants also asked how the City of Edmonton could better inform Indigenous community members about the kihcihkaw askî-Sacred Land site and support access to sage and sweet grass on site or at park spaces.



The kihcihkaw askî-Sacred Land site includes two fire pits.

Beyond kihcihkaw askî-Sacred Land, feedback spoke to the importance of Indigenous community members having access to nature for cultural practices. For example, there was an interest in allocating portions of municipal parks for Indigenous community needs, including sweat lodge ceremonies for women and space to share Indigenous teachings such as creation stories.

Ceremony emerged as an important theme in these discussions as participants inquired about the City of Edmonton's efforts to respect and observe Indigenous practices. For example, some asked about efforts to create space for ceremonies as a part of construction projects or when land is disturbed to respect spiritual concerns. Facilitators heard that Indigenous Peoples need to be included in these processes to ensure those concerns are addressed.

Likewise, participants inquired about the ability to smudge at municipal and community league facilities, including designated space and a process for impromptu ceremonies when advance notice is not feasible. Some asked for more communications around the process for smudging at City of Edmonton facilities, and whether the greater public appreciates the significance of this ceremony.



Inuit Elder Edna Elias tends a qulliq, a traditional oil lamp, at city hall.

Safety and Sensitivity

Following our commitments under the Indigenous Framework, discussion tables heard questions about the City of Edmonton's efforts to create safe spaces for Indigenous Peoples.

“Do Indigenous employees have access to an Elder?”

Facilitators heard that community members witness law enforcement services abuse their power and traumatize Indigenous community members. Participants looked to the City of Edmonton to address these concerns.

Check-in participants also wanted to know how the City of Edmonton is engaging Indigenous employees on the topic of anti-racism, and circumstances around access to Indigenous Elders for these employees.

Feedback called for more sensitivity training for transit operators, particularly regarding interactions with Indigenous community members, as well as greater Indigenous representation in this part of the workforce.

Engaging and Retaining Indigenous Employees

Through the Indigenous Framework, we are committed to removing systemic barriers for Indigenous Peoples seeking employment with the City of Edmonton. This commitment prompted discussions about our application and hiring processes, as well as employee retention. Participants asked about Indigenous representation and agency in the workforce, accommodations for ceremony and employee disclosure of Indigenous identity.



Edmonton Fire Chief Joe Zatylny greets a Miyowatisiwin Camp Inspire participant in June 2023.

Facilitators heard that some candidates experience difficulties while navigating the online application platform, which might benefit from changes to better accommodate Indigenous users. For example, feedback suggested some Indigenous applicants may find it easier to communicate through storytelling than listing accomplishments on a résumé or cover letter.

Amid feedback that First Nations and Métis peoples have been made to feel unwelcome, participants voiced concerns about the City of Edmonton’s ability to retain Indigenous employees, as well as the potential for discrimination in the hiring process. Some spoke to the need for a transparent plan that supports Indigenous employee recruitment in addition to more Indigenous staff involved in the recruitment process.

“First Nations and Métis peoples do not fit in, and are not made to feel welcome.”

Suggestions included partnering with community organizations to hold job fairs, working with post-secondary institutions to recruit Indigenous graduates and creating employment opportunities, such as youth internships, specifically for Indigenous Peoples.

Reconciliation

Since the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s calls to action are foundational to the Indigenous Framework, participants wanted to learn just what reconciliation means to the City of Edmonton. In light of our commitment to reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples, feedback around this question was careful to distinguish the 94 calls to action from a checklist.

“Reconciliation is not a checklist.”

Suggestions included making a greater effort to work with frontline organizations and social service agencies serving Indigenous Peoples, an important part of Edmonton’s multicultural community that needs to flourish. Facilitators

also heard that beyond efforts to answer the calls to action, and calls for justice outlined in the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, the City of Edmonton needs a spiritual renewal.



A crowd gathers in Kinsmen Park for the third annual Orange Shirt Day Run and Walk in 2023.

Next Steps

The *Indigenous Framework 2023 What We Heard Report* is now being shared with all participants of the November 2023 check-in sessions, as well as Edmonton City Council and the Executive Leadership Team. This report contains valuable community feedback that will guide our plans and efforts to implement the framework throughout municipal departments and continue our reconciliation journey with Indigenous Peoples — as listeners, partners, connectors and advocates.

Participants will receive updates on related events, including the presentation of the 2023 Indigenous Framework annual report to Edmonton City Council scheduled for September 16, 2024 (date subject to change). Please visit edmonton.ca/meetings for more information about Edmonton City Council and committee meetings, and to view or register to speak at these meetings.

There will be more opportunities for conversation and connection between City of Edmonton staff, Indigenous community members and partners throughout 2024. Upcoming municipal projects aim to continue including Indigenous community voices. We greatly appreciate your participation, which helps to shape these initiatives.

Thank you!



Brad Crowfoot's *Heart Beat of a Nation*.

We would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to all Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Holders as well as community members and partners for their participation in the Indigenous Framework 2023 community check-in sessions.

As our guide to building strong and supportive relationships with Indigenous Peoples, the Indigenous Framework was built on years of dialogue with Indigenous communities. But it is also a living initiative that changes and adapts as our relationships grow. We look forward to continued dialogue, strengthening our connections with Indigenous community members and continuing our reconciliation journey together.

Appendix

Supplemental information and resources for many of the questions and comments heard at the November check-in sessions can be found on the following City of Edmonton and partner webpages.

Housing and Houselessness

[Indigenous Housing Programs](#)

[Housing and Homelessness](#)

[Public Washrooms](#)

[How to Access Housing](#)

[Responding to Homelessness in Our Communities](#)

[Data and Analytics \(Homeward Trust\)](#)

[Social Development](#)

Connecting with Indigenous Communities

[Indigenous Relations Office](#)

[Public Engagement](#)

[Indigenous Framework Timeline and Resources](#)

[Relationship with Enoch Cree Nation](#)

Resurgence

[Indigenous Artist-in-Residence Program](#)

[Indigenous Edmonton Directory](#)

[Operating Grant for Indigenous-led Organizations](#)

[Queen Elizabeth Park](#)

[Indigenous History Month](#)

[Sustainable Procurement](#)

[Indigenous Framework Artworks](#)

[Recognizing Métis Week](#)

[Edmonton's Public Art](#)

[Indigenous Culture and Wellness Centre](#)

[Public Art to Enhance Edmonton's Public Realm \(Council Policy\)](#)

[Public Art to Enhance Edmonton's Public Realm \(Procedure\)](#)

Elder Protocol

[Offering Protocol \(video\)](#)

Urban Reserves

[Urban Reserve Strategy](#)

Youth

[Nîkâniw Indigenous Youth Leadership Program](#)

[Opportunities for Indigenous Youth](#)

[Civic Youth Internship](#)

[Camp Inspire](#)

Ceremonial Sites and Medicines

[kihcihkaw askî-Sacred Land](#)

[Smudging \(video\)](#)

[Indigenous Knowledge & Wisdom Centre](#)

Safety and Sensitivity

[Community Outreach Transit Team \(COTT\)](#)

[Community Safety & Well Being Strategy](#)

[Anti-racism in Our City](#)

[One Strong Voice](#)

[Moose Hide Campaign](#)

[Okîsikow \(Angel\) Way](#)

[Community Safety and Well-being Grant](#)

[Transit Safety Plan](#)

[Professional Standards](#)

[Edmonton Police Commission](#)

[Policing complaints, appeals and compliments \(Alberta government\)](#)

Engaging and Retaining Indigenous Employees

[Indigenous Job Seekers](#)

[Anti-racism in Our City](#)

[Talent Diversification and Inclusion Programs](#)

[The Art of Inclusion: Our Diversity and Inclusion Framework](#)

Reconciliation

[National Day for Truth and Reconciliation](#)

[Missing & Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, & 2SLGBTQQIA+](#)

[Treaty No. 6 Recognition Day](#)

[Indigenous Framework](#)

[Sisters in Spirit Day](#)

[Walk a Mile in a Ribbon Skirt](#)