



## Report to Council

### From the Office of Councillor Amy Lubik

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Date: March 29, 2021

Subject: Request for Council Support to Celebrate Lunar and Persian New Year

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#### Purpose

To gain council support to light up City Hall for Lunar New Year and Norwuz, as well as providing social media greetings and links to credible celebratory information.

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#### Recommendation

**WHEREAS 8.9% of Port Moody's Population is of Persian descent (12.7% of recent immigrants), and a collective 29.8% of the population are from Korean, China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan;**

**WHEREAS the city currently mainly acknowledges and celebrates "Western" holidays, and many people do not know much about how a large part of our community celebrate the biggest holidays, or even how beautiful the multicultural tapestry of Port Moody is;**

**WHEREAS celebrating diverse holidays and learning from diverse populations builds community connectedness and demonstrates solidarity with a large portion of our community;**

**THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT Port Moody staff be directed to review which holiday it acknowledges and celebrates;**

**AND THAT Port Moody annually light up City Hall Green for Norwuz, Persian New Year, and Red for Lunar New Year;**

**AND THAT staff report back on the potential to send greetings for those holidays through our social media and website, which could include credible links to background information and stories about these holidays in order to promote understanding and celebration among a wider audience.**

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#### Background

Port Moody has proven to be a leader in promoting community health and togetherness, including standing with refugees, taking action on reconciliation, and supporting a project on food story sharing; however, especially in a time when a pandemic has shone a gloomy light on racism in our community, we need to be looking for ways to celebrate diversity.

Port Moody has a diverse population to celebrate, as is shown in the statistics in the NewToBC 2018 report (attachment 1). All populations of Port Moody are to be welcomed, included, and celebrated, and not everyone celebrates differently than what is currently undertaken in our city; however, Because Port Moody has a significant population whose biggest holidays are not currently acknowledged, we have the opportunity to show our appreciation by finding ways to celebrate Lunar New Year (which is celebrated by approximately 30% of the population), and Norwuz, Persian New Year, which is celebrated by approximately 10% of the population (it is also celebrated in Iran, Kurdistan, Afghanistan, Iraq, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, India, Pakistan, and Turkey).

## Discussion

From a 2019 Winnipeg Campaign:

*A group seeking to foster greater inclusion of minority groups in Canadian society wants city officials in Winnipeg to add a few more holidays to the list of official celebrations.*

*Organizers of a campaign called WinnLove have put together a campaign calling on Mayor Brian Bowman to recognize a wider range of cultural holidays.*

*"I think we live in a multi-ethnic society, but I don't think we live in a multicultural society, and that's what this whole pledge aims to achieve," Rehman Abdulrehman during an interview with Marcy Markusa, host of CBC Manitoba's morning radio show Information Radio. The Winnipeg psychologist, who specializes in diversity and inclusion, is an organizer of WinnLove.*

*Traditional European and Christian holidays are widely observed in Canada, with many designated as statutory holidays — but many major holidays from other cultures such as Eid al-Fitr, Rosh Hashanah and Chinese New Year don't get the same level of recognition.*

*At the municipal level, official civic acknowledgment of celebrations from other cultures not only helps minority groups feel included but has benefits for the majority as well, Abdulrehman said. "It also informs and educates people who are not from that community. So it creates a sense of harmony," he said.*

*Excluding celebrations from other cultures can also have harmful effects on the majority, Abdulrehman said.*

*"It artificially increases a sense of self-worth in a culture and an ethnic identity when you don't have that inclusion," he said.*

### **Petition calls for city to review holiday list**

*A letter posted by WinnLove on the petition website change.org calls on Mayor Bowman to find some way of marking diverse cultural celebrations city-wide. One idea put forward would see lights set up around the city which could be programmed to glow in different colours, according to the holiday.*

*It also asks the city to review the list of holidays it currently recognizes, and explore the possibility of adding new holidays or renaming existing ones to include other cultural celebrations.*

*Although the City of Winnipeg cannot unilaterally declare a new civic holiday, Abdulrehman wants the mayor's help in taking this initiative to the provincial government.*

*A statement from Bowman's office says the mayor has done a number of things since taking office to recognize and celebrate cultural holidays.*

*"Prayers for Ramadan were hosted this year at City Hall for the first time. A Hanukkah celebration was hosted at City Hall this past December, as well," the statement said. "Cultural holidays are regularly recognized through announcements and events. The mayor is certainly open to hearing if more can be done."*

*Which holidays we celebrate may seem like a small thing to those whose traditions are officially acknowledged, Abdulrehman said, but members of minority groups often see it as more pressing issue.*

*"Most of the time people [from majority cultures] don't get the sense of urgency about being inclusive, because they don't have the lived experience of experiencing discrimination," he said.*

Looking at current Port Moody Statistics, as cited above, Lunar New Year<sup>1,2</sup> and Norwuz<sup>3</sup> seem to be the most widely celebrated holidays; however, the city could investigate other potentially important holidays. Recently Vancouver lit up City Hall for Norwuz, which was an ask of the Persian community, which provides a precedent. Another way to reach out to community members would be to send greetings through social media and provide credible links such that all members of the community can learn and celebrate.

As a community we have embraced diversity, inclusion and antiracism, this is an opportunity to put our values into practice.

## Other Option

THAT the report dated March 29, 2021 from Councillor Amy Lubik regarding Request for Council Support to Celebrate Lunar and Persian New Year be received for information.

## Financial Implications

There are no financial implications associated with this report.

## Communications and Civic Engagement Initiatives

Should the recommendation be passed, there would be communications and civic engagement initiatives related to lighting up City Hall and providing social media greetings and outreach.

## Council Strategic Plan Objectives

- The health and wellness needs of residents;
- Embrace and defend diversity
- Courage to lead and embrace new ideas

## Attachment

1. New to BC 2018

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Lunar-New-Year>

<sup>2</sup> [http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/special/china\\_general\\_lunar.htm](http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/special/china_general_lunar.htm)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.vancouverisawesome.com/courier-archive/community/norwuz-traditions-burn-bright-2995723>