

To: City of Port Moody Heritage Commission (the “Commission”)

From: Heritage Commission Reconciliation Subcommittee (the “Subcommittee”)

Re: Reconciliation Sub-committee Work Plan and Scope of Work

Date : October 31, 2020

Introduction

This document summarizes, and provides explanatory context for, a recommendation of the Subcommittee to the Commission. That recommendation is that the Commission consider, as a high priority, embedding reconciliation in to the City of Port Moody’s Heritage preservation efforts, with a particular focus on inventorying existing materials and language.

Social mores shift over time. Language can be used with good intentions yet inadvertently trip over other perspectives not considered at the time. The proposed review will examine that issue.

Executive Summary

The Subcommittee’s recommendation is to include as a 2021 work plan activity, a comprehensive review of all Commission published written materials. The purpose of the review is to consider whether the City’s inventory of storyboard, stone makers and other public facing “heritage collateral” contains language that merits refinement through a reconciliation lens.

Whether or not such language exists and what steps would be taken in reconsidering that language is a contextual and situation-specific analysis requiring community stakeholder consultation. Therefore, the outcome of the proposed review is uncertain. However, engaging in the review itself is inherently beneficial. Our view is that the City of Port Moody has the opportunity to credibly and cogently engage in self-reflection on historical language in a way that would demonstrably further the City’s reconciliation efforts.

Analysis

The findings of the Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission¹ are well known. Many municipalities in Canada have taken on a variety of that Commission’s

¹ <https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1450124405592/1529106060525>

recommendations.² Often, there is a direct tie-in on the part of the Canadian municipality's reconciliation efforts and its Heritage body.³ There has also been much work in the not-for-profit sector: the following quote from Heritage B.C. is instructive:

*Reconciliation involves a humble recognition of the impacts of the colonial past, and the deep history and relationships that Indigenous people have on their lands. With that awareness and a spirit of cooperation, reconciliation offers the opportunity to change behaviour and bring healing.*⁴

This quote reflects the cross-roads that many Heritage Commissions in British Columbia face: on one hand we seek to preserve and maintain items from the post-colonial historical built form in the face of rapid development and social change. But on the other hand, the total impact of that colonial past – and the use of colonial language that may seem innocuous but on further reflection may prove offensive to some stakeholders -- is not always considered.

The Commission as a whole is undoubtedly to be commended for the robust work undertaken in Port Moody to preserve and recognize early postcolonial narratives. Less work has been undertaken in considering when language might inadvertently result in unintended reactions or impacts to various members of the community.

Language that may prove eye-catching includes: anything that says or implies lands were unoccupied, anything connoting savagery or 'untamed' wilderness, and/or anything that proves unduly dismissive of existing human activities at a location.⁵

² See for example the City of Victoria:

<https://www.victoria.ca/EN/main/city/witness-reconciliation-program/five-trc-calls-to-action-for-municipal-government.html>

³ See the efforts of the City of Lethbridge to fulsomely embedded heritage into its reconciliation efforts as documented throughout this presentation.

<https://getinvolvedlethbridge.ca/10146/widgets/42454/documents/19358/download>

⁴ <https://heritagebc.ca/resources/first-peoples-heritage/>

⁵ A perhaps somewhat exaggerated example or study in contrasts can be found here:

<https://culturallymodified.org/decolonizing-bcs-roadside-history/>

Our proposal would be to work with Indigenous community members on a consultative review of language used throughout story boards, stone markers, and related collateral materials, with a view towards providing a detailed explanation of any language that may be considered for revision and the rationale for revision.

An additional or alternative outcome of this review may be to consider whether or not any specific site names (or future site names) might either be reconsidered or amended to recognize pre-colonial Aboriginal heritage, which has been a particular focus of municipal reconciliation efforts across Canada, including within Metro.⁶

Conclusion

The Subcommittee strongly believes that the City of Port Moody has an opportunity to lead among the Tri-Cities in matters related to municipal reconciliation. This project would be, in our view, a terrific step in that direction.

Anticipated project metrics, timeline and costs would be as follows:

1. Sub-committee members would spend the 2021 Committee work year gathering language from storyboards and markers;
2. Sub-committee would organize and facilitate one or more guest speakers (for the Committee) to further discuss the language challenges around “de-colonization”;
3. Sub-committee would arrange for local subject-matter experts (“SME”) from a local First Nation that has experience in engaging in municipal projects (those with lived experience and germane professional experience) to provide feedback on the review;
4. At the end of the 2021 work period, the Sub-committee would deliver a report to the Committee on recommendations (if any) for enhanced language refinement and/or language best practices going forward; and
5. Estimated costs are non-material and/or TBD, but might include a reasonable stipend for SME activities.

⁶ See City of Vancouver 2017 staff report on this matter:
<https://council.vancouver.ca/20171213/documents/cfsc1.pdf>