

King Township establishes land acknowledgement

By Mark PavilonsEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter

King Township is paying homage to Indigenous communities and our history. Councillors adopted the creation of a Township-wide Land Acknowledgment recently, reflecting past, present and future Indigenous communities in King. It also reaffirms King's commitment towards Truth and Reconciliation. Once completed, the Land Acknowledgement will physically be represented at each municipal site as a lasting reminder. Staff noted the acknowledgement is the municipality's first step in defining its own policy regarding Indigenous initiatives and Truth & Reconciliation, with the intent of encouraging stronger relationships with Indigenous communities and nations, including our Treaty Partners: the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation and the Williams Treaty First Nation. With council's okay, staff will craft the acknowledgement and presented it back to council in 2025. Similar to acknowledging the land's history, and often recited prior to public and council meetings, the new Land Acknowledgement will recognize the Indigenous peoples who have called the land upon which King Township sits home. An early draft, prior to the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation Sept. 30, reads: "We acknowledge that the Township of King sits within the Treaty Lands and Territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation and the Williams Treaty First Nation, as well as the traditional territory of the Huron-Wendat and Haudenosaunee peoples. We thank them for sharing this land with us. Together, we will continue to celebrate the heritage, diverse cultures and outstanding achievements of Indigenous people." Councillor Debbie Schaefer said she was pleased with the process staff went through, as well as reaching out to Indigenous groups. "We are making an effort to be more aware of the history" and current events, she said. In 2023, Heritage and Cultural staff engaged in recognized training on Land Acknowledgements to learn how to use them beyond an initial statement; and, create a meaningful impact to support Indigenous peoples in the community. Through this course, staff recognized the existing acknowledgement was not sufficient for properly recognizing the important role that Indigenous peoples play in our history, present, and future; nor, did it recognize the impacts of colonization on this land. To rectify this, staff first wrote a new draft Land Acknowledgement using lessons from that course. In late 2023, staff engaged Indigenous consultant Andrew McConnell (Secondment to the Faculty of Education at York University in Toronto and former Indigenous Education Coordinator to York Region District School Board) to edit and refine the statement to the current proposed version. It has helped staff understand the importance and meaning behind its words. The final version was also compared against the MCFN Land Acknowledgement Guidelines to ensure compliance with the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. The statement was also sent directly to Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation for approval, whereby it was confirmed satisfactory without further amendments required. A Land Acknowledgement expresses gratitude to the Indigenous people whose territory we reside on and honors those who have lived here since time immemorial. "More importantly, it acknowledges that Indigenous communities reside within these territories today, as their roles continue to shape our present and future. This message is crucial in understanding the history that brought us here and our dynamic role within it," staff noted in their report. "Land Acknowledgments also highlight the effects of colonialism ongoing to this day, requiring mindfulness of our present participation. This practice follows Indigenous protocol, respecting the original stewards of the land." Many municipalities in Ontario (and across Canada) have adopted Land Acknowledgements for use at council meetings, official municipal events or displayed prominently including Georgina, East Gwillimbury, Newmarket, Vaughan, Richmond Hill, Markham, York Region, and others. Several municipalities also post a Land Acknowledgement on their respective websites with additional information on Truth and Reconciliation and the Indigenous histories of their community. In the 1400s, the Wyandot people (Huron or Wendat) traditionally inhabited areas around Lake Ontario and Georgian Bay, but by the 1600s, European diseases and Haudenosaunee expansion led to their dispersion. The Haudenosaunee, living south of Lake Ontario, destroyed Wyandot villages in the 1649-1650 period, expanding their territory. By the 1680s, the Anishinaabe pushed the Haudenosaunee back south of Lake Ontario. The 1787 Gunshot Treaty was later disputed, while the 1805 Toronto Purchase between the Mississaugas and the British Crown was ratified. In 1923, the Williams Treaties were signed with various First Nations. Settlements in 2010 and 2018 with the Canadian government addressed compensation for historical grievances, including \$145 million for the Toronto Purchase Claim and Brant Tract Claim in 2010, and \$666 million from Canada and \$444 million from Ontario in 2018, along with recognition of treaty rights and additional reserve lands. King Township sits in the boundaries of two separate treaties: Treaty 13 (also known as the "Toronto Purchase") which was signed with the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation (MCFN); and the Williams Treaty with the Williams Treaty First Nation. To

ensure that the drafted Land Acknowledgement was acceptable, the MCFN were contacted in Summer 2024 for approval and have given their assent for the proposed statement to be used by the Township. During this process, the Township will continue to strengthen relationships with Indigenous Treaty Partners: the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation and the Williams Treaty First Nations; as well as build new relationships with Indigenous communities and nations. As per the Land Acknowledgement statement, the Township will continue to promote Indigenous initiatives, culture, and heritage in the Township and develop partnerships mutual to both parties.