



February 14, 2022

Dear Mayor Gondek and City Councillors,

Thank you for your consideration of the motion that will be put before you tomorrow, February, 15, which considers initiating a land transfer to the Indigenous Gathering Place Society of Calgary (IGPSC). An affirmative vote will give space to a decades-long vision for an Indigenous Gathering Place in Calgary. ***We humbly ask that you read this letter and deeply contemplate the potential for an authentic and timely action toward reconciliation.***

Rooted in the Seven Sacred Teachings

As the IGPSC, we uphold the values of *love, trust, courage, respect, wisdom, honesty, and humility*. These seven sacred teachings matter deeply to us and are guideposts as we work to advance the vision to build a physical gathering place in Calgary that is:

*A space where we share, connect, heal, renew, and celebrate Indigenous cultures.
A place to protect Indigenous practices, languages; and Elders' wisdom, oral and written teachings among all nations and all our relations.*

Calgary is home to over 40,000 First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people from diverse Nations and communities with and without representative bodies. A key part of the IGPSC's vision is to build a place where ***all Indigenous cultures will be celebrated***, offering the opportunity to connect and heal while participating in community.

We are a grassroots Indigenous-led non-profit cultural society that is volunteer-driven and supported by those who share our vision. We work collaboratively to create a place for, with and by Indigenous peoples for true reconciliation and healing, spirituality and cultural exchange. As a grassroots non-profit society, the IGPSC does not represent all or any groups of Indigenous peoples and therefore has no legal authority to conduct consultation on a nation-to-nation basis. We remain inclusive in our practices and have always invited everyone interested to join the discussion. We are looking forward to continuing this collaborative approach to engagement as the project advances with all who are interested. We respect the very important role of Nation leaders who represent their own members and encourage these leader-to-leader conversations simultaneously while our non-profit collective advances this ambitious project.

The idea of an Indigenous Gathering Place (IGP) was reignited in 2014 in response to a question posed by Chief Robert Joseph during a workshop that brought community leaders and agency representatives together: "*What does Calgary need to reconcile?*" The IGPSC was ceremonially



validated as the appropriate group to carry this work through a First Nation protocol of a Pipe Ceremony in 2017. We formed through the Western protocol as a non-profit Society in 2018. We are continuing the conversations that began decades ago. We are welcoming of all people who share this goal and we thank the hundreds of community members from within and around Calgary who have joined us on our journey over the last eight years. We wish the IGP to be in addition to the hard work that many are tirelessly doing across the City to meet the diverse needs of Indigenous peoples. The IGP is another action step toward true reconciliation and is not looking to displace or replicate services and programming.

The Journey Ahead

Further conversations and open discussions will be an important part of learning what else this space will be used for and we are looking forward to further defining the scope in a collaborative way. The process for developing an IGP has and will continue to respect both Indigenous and Western protocols and practices. **We describe this approach, in which one way of working is not seen as 'better than' the other, as working in "ethical space"**. Our Elders teach us that there are parallels that can be found between Indigenous and Western practices, and that space between those parallels is the *ethical space* where we come together. We believe that within this *ethical space*, reconciliation is possible. This is a unique approach and a key determinant of why the City has committed to support and learn from the IGP in our work together.

The IGPSC envisions a gathering place that is inclusive and welcoming for all peoples. We are guided by the input from the diverse Indigenous peoples in and around this land, especially by the Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and youth. The gathering place will be a safe access point for Indigenous people to connect with each other and the Elders and Knowledge Keepers that are fundamental to our survival as peoples. We have heard time and again from engagement sessions about the urgency of building an IGP. **We cannot see a delay.** Knowledge is being lost. Language is being lost. The Elders that have said they want to see this built before they die, have waited and waited, and some have since passed on.

We implore Council to consider this urgency in your decision-making. There will be many more opportunities to envision the space together through collaboration. Those conversations will continue as we take this next step to explore meeting the needs of so many citizens.



Inclusive Engagement

In May 2018, Métis Nation of Alberta (MNA) Region 3 was one of the first groups specifically invited to explore the idea of an IGP and join an open discussion and feast to ask everyone we knew two preliminary questions:

1. *As the IGP moves forward, who should we be talking to and why?*
2. *What should we be talking about? Where and how should the IGP seek input from community members?*

At the time, the MNA Region 3 leadership declined the invitation due to a schedule conflict but asked for further clarification to understand the need for an IGP given the presence of the Friendship Centre. A follow-up discussion clarified the IGPSC's intention to avoid duplicating existing services, programs or resources, after which MNA Region 3 leadership encouraged us to invite Métis Nation Elders. We were happy that Elders endorsed the IGP through a Pipe Ceremony held on June 26, 2018, at Tsuut'ina Nation with full blessings to move forward.

Every meeting we have had and every meeting we will have is open for all. Elder Sky Blue Morin, one of the Métis Nation Elders and Michif language speaker who joined us at that Pipe Ceremony, has provided a letter in support of the motion along with her extensive knowledge about *why* the IGP meets an urgent need. We are also encouraged by the many individual Métis Nation of Alberta citizens and Elders who have continued to be involved in all IGPSC activities throughout the last eight years.

Broad Community Support

The IGPSC is grateful for the spiritual, human, emotional, and financial resources that have been gifted to us over the years. We have been funded through grants from organizations like the Calgary Foundation and Calgary Homeless Foundation, in addition to receiving private donations. While no funding for IGPSC activities has come from the City of Calgary to date, we are excited about the opportunity to work more closely together over the coming months and years.

The IGPSC is humbled by the support we have received from our many organizational partners and allies. Within this package you will find letters of support from the following:

Indigenous Organizations and Leaders

- Elders Knowledge Circle, including Elders Reg Crowshoe, Rosemary Crowshoe, Tina Fox, Anne Paulette Kokak, Herman Many Guns, Diane Meguinis, Vinnia Van Overdyk, Violet March, Frisco,



Brenda Manyguns, John Chief Moon, Wallace Alexson, Darryl Brass, Jackie Bromley, Shirlee Crow Shoe, Doreen Healy, Patrick Daigneault, and Francis Melting Tallow

- Michif language speaker and Métis knowledge keeper Elder SkyBlue Morin
- Blackfoot Language Revival Initiative
- Métis Calgary Child and Family Services
- Awo Taan Healing Lodge
- Sunrise Healing Lodge Society
- Aboriginal Standing Committee on Housing and Homelessness
- Miskanawah Community Services Association
- Calgary Aboriginal Urban Affairs Committee
- Colouring It Forward
- Circle for Aboriginal Relations Society

Community Organizations and Leaders

- Calgary Foundation
- Calgary Homeless Foundation
- Alberta Recreation & Parks Association
- Big Brothers Big Sisters of Calgary and Area
- MRU Institute for Community Prosperity
- Suncor Energy Foundation
- Calgary Arts Development
- Momentum
- Axis Connects
- Circle Connections for Reconciliation
- Oscill8 Collective
- Social Policy Collaborative
 - Including the following organizations: The Calgary Counselling Centre; The Calgary Food Bank; Carya Society of Calgary; Catholic Family Services; CUPS; The University of Calgary; Momentum; United Way of Calgary and Area; Vibrant Communities Calgary; The Women's Centre of Calgary; YW Calgary; The Alex; Inn From the Cold; Calgary Drop In Centre; Trellis; and McMan
- Calgary Alliance for the Common Good
 - Including the following members: Amalgamated Transit Union Local 583; Ambrose University; Anatolian Turkish Islamic Center of Calgary; Anglican Diocese of Calgary; B'Nai Tikvah; Calgary Climate Hub; Calgary Interfaith Council; Calgary Unitarians; Cerebral Palsy Association in Alberta; Christ Church Anglican; Eritrean Canadian Community Association of Calgary; EthioCare; General Teamsters Local 362; Good Shephard Moravian; Hillhurst United; Knox United; Synod of Alberta & the Territories - Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada; Lutheran Church of the Cross; Roman Catholic Diocese of Calgary - Office of Social Justice; Scarboro United; St. Andrew's Anglican Church; St. David's United Church; St. Laurence Anglican; St. Mary's University; St. Thomas United Church; Symons Valley United Church; The Canadian Union of Public Employees, Local 37 (CUPE); The Canadian Union of Public Employees, Local 38 (CUPE); The Canadian Union of Public Employees,



Local 1169 (CUPE) - Calgary and Cochrane Public Library Workers; Trinity Place
Foundation; UBCJA - 2103

Walking *With* the City of Calgary

We also celebrate our relationship with the City of Calgary, which was formalized through the Western protocol of a Memorandum of Understanding and validated through an Indigenous protocol of a Pipe Ceremony on May 26, 2021 which shows commitment to advance the work and conversation in a good way. As has been noted by the Calgary Aboriginal Urban Affairs Committee (CAUAC), building an IGP advances key recommendations from the White Goose Flying Report as tangible and direct responses to the Truth & Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action #21, #22, and #48ii.

We commend the bold actions proposed in the *Indigenous Gathering Place Land Transfer* Notice of Motion that will be considered on February 15, 2022. Many municipalities have sought to develop Indigenous cultural spaces within their existing colonial city structures, by making a decision first to create a gathering space and then inviting communities to participate. You, however, recognize the far more meaningful action of initiating the process of transferring land to a grassroots group of Indigenous peoples for their own use to build a gathering space as they so determine through trust and collaboration. ***This is truly a made-in-Calgary approach that may serve as a path that others might be inspired to pursue.*** We are most excited to explore the positive impacts for all as an important economic and cultural hub adding vitality to the rivers district area while ensuring the central location gives equitable access to all Calgarians.

Your recognition of the importance of Indigenous self-determination is in alignment with the spirit of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action, and shows courage, wisdom, honesty, respect, humility, trust, and love. Thank you for walking with us along this path in ceremony and procedure as we move toward healing as a City.

We urge all members of Council to vote in favour of the Notice of Motion and look forward to the work we will do together to advance our shared vision.

John Fischer, Co-Chair
Michelle Fournie, Co-Chair
Anne Harding, Vice-Chair

On behalf of the Indigenous Gathering Place Society Board of Directors