



ABORIGINAL STANDING COMMITTEE

on Housing and Homelessness

Indigenous Gathering Place

February 8, 2022

Mayor Gondok and Councillors

Re: Response to the City's Allocation of Land Transfer for the Indigenous Gathering Place

Dear Honorable Mayor Gondok and Councillors

The Aboriginal Standing Committee on Housing and Homelessness (ASCHH) has provided support to the urban Indigenous community through advocacy, research, and education on the issues of Indigenous housing and homelessness since 1999. We have acted in the capacity of the Community Advisory Board as decision makers for federal Indigenous funds for homelessness and housing projects in Calgary over the past 23 years. We work in collaboration with community and governments to develop solutions towards the reduction of Indigenous homelessness and improving core housing stability.

ASCHH was initially heavily involved in the early development of the Indigenous Gathering Place (IGP) along with the Aboriginal Friendship Centre (George Calliou/Joe Pimlott), Sunrise Healing Lodge (Eve McMillan) and many other community partners. The IGP work was headed by Eve who identified this project as an essential direction in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action in 2015. These early discussions were focused on the importance of urban Indigenous peoples in Calgary having a place of connection, culture and community. While various organizations have taken on this role to some degree throughout the years, for some time our community has been without a distinct space or centre committed solely for this purpose and open to all urban Indigenous peoples.

The urban Indigenous population is an independent stakeholder from the existing distinction-based Indigenous groups reflecting First Nation, Métis and Inuit peoples. As such urban populations reflect multiple nations, treaty areas, affiliated and non-affiliated Métis peoples, non-status and Inuit peoples from across the country. Many Indigenous peoples have been disenfranchised from their culture due to the historical context of colonization and assimilation policies which included residential schools, the 60s scoop and the current day child welfare systems. In addition, urbanization of Indigenous peoples has contributed to the limitation of meaningful connection to culture and Indigenous community. As such, the Indigenous Gathering Place is imperative for urban Indigenous peoples and should reflect the diversity of our peoples and provide access to diverse cultural teachings, traditions, ceremonies and community connections.

It is important for the City of Calgary, to understand that as a community of Indigenous people, we need to move forward on what is best for our community. For the benefit of all Indigenous peoples in our community, we need to be open and collaborative towards the development of projects which enhance the lives of urban Indigenous peoples. Over the many years, collaboration and communication has been essential in bringing forward this project to where it is today and extensive work to this end has been accomplished to include as many voices



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similarly committed to this spirit of collaboration. While throughout its development there have been parties, whose commitment may have waned or disengaged, it can be assured that all essential parties have been consulted or invited to participate at multiple junctures regardless of their commitment at this time.

The Indigenous Gathering Place, is for all indigenous peoples and will provide an important and historic opportunity for the City of Calgary to provide this space and place to broaden the accessibility of indigenous community and culture for all indigenous Calgarians no matter whether they are from the local territory, or those of us who have made Moh'kins'tsis our home.

The Indigenous Gathering Place began as initial discussions amongst interested parties, and an extensive amount of volunteer work and community support has been involved in working towards its development. The City of Calgary's Poverty Reduction groups also identified an Indigenous Gathering Place as a vital urban project through the work of Genevieve Fox with the Enough for All strategies under the Indigenous Constellation. All those willing to be community partners in this endeavor have been highly engaged in this project which included both urban indigenous peoples, leaders, distinction-based groups, as well as highly supported by Elders and community allies.

The Indigenous Gathering Place has been working actively with community stakeholders and the Elders Knowledge Circle throughout the past 6 years, with open support and collaboration. No one has intentionally been left out of these discussions or the development of the project. Almost all of the work has been conducted by dedicated and passionate volunteers who are working towards the actualization of an Indigenous Gathering Place. To be in opposition at this stage is not conducive to the desire that most urban indigenous Calgarians do want and will support this project and support the City's announcement.

ASCHH is highly supportive of the City's original announcement on January 15, 2022 to commence discussions on land transfers to the Indigenous Gathering Place Society for the purpose of further development of the IGP. This is necessary and an imperative step towards reconciliation. We implore the City to continue to focus on the larger objective of supporting all urban indigenous Calgarians towards an opportunity that will benefit all of us.

Katelyn Lucas/Richard Horvath
ASCHH Co-Chairs