



City Council News February 20, 2019

Toward true reconciliation

There's a lot of talk about recognition and reconciliation with First Nations these days; not just here in Canada, but around the world. This dialogue was spurred on by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), which was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2007. Twelve years after its adoption as an international standard, BC has committed to becoming the first province to legislate the implementation of UNDRIP.

In last week's Speech from the Throne in the BC Legislature, the provincial government committed to "true and lasting reconciliation with Indigenous peoples ... by working with First Nations to make sure they are full participants in decision-making that affect their rights and lands." The Throne Speech states that the proposed UNDRIP implementation legislation, which was co-developed with First Nations leadership organizations, "will form the foundation for the Province's work on reconciliation, mandating government to bring provincial laws and policies into harmony with the Declaration."

By definition, reconciliation means "the restoration of friendly relations" or "the action of making one view or belief compatible with another." Both senses of the word are needed to achieve reconciliation with First Nations here in BC. But, achieving true reconciliation will also involve resolving, legally and financially, long-standing issues related

to land claims and the historical attempts by previous governments to extinguish First Nations' language and culture.

Simply put, there cannot be true reconciliation with words alone.

We can't simply "make nice" with First Nations' communities in order to restore "friendly relations;" we must find real ways to address the real wrongs that were committed when this province and country was settled by Europeans.

In 2015, Quesnel City Council started down the path of recognition and reconciliation with our local First Nations communities. Due to the primacy of their claims over the land which forms the legal boundaries of the City of Quesnel our initial focus was to restore relations with the Lhtako Dene, upon whose unceded territory (meaning that Aboriginal Title has neither been surrendered nor acquired by the Crown) the City sits.

Over a period of two years, elected leaders and staff from Lhtako and the City met with each other, broke bread together, and began a dialogue about how we could work together to not simply redress old wrongs, but to create new partnerships that will benefit present and future generations who will call Quesnel home.

This dialogue led to the Lhtako Dene territory being recognized in all of the City's public spaces and at the start of all Council meetings; the flying of the Lhtako flag at the Visitor Centre; and, the signing of a protocol agreement between the City of Quesnel and the Lhtako Dene Nation. But, these are all simply words, if we do not follow them up with concerted action.

This week, Council was presented with an overview of the application the Lhtako Dene has submitted for federal and provincial funding which, if successful, would see the Lhtako build a beautiful cultural centre at the confluence of the Quesnel and Fraser Rivers, a location of incredible cultural and historic significance not just to the Lhtako Dene but to all Canadians.

In an effort to advance our dialogue with Lhtako toward true reconciliation, Council not only endorsed and supported their application, we also passed a motion to restore the ownership of the property upon which the cultural centre would be built to the Lhtako Dene if the application is successful. It's a small step toward true reconciliation here in Quesnel.

Council will now begin dialogue with our other First Nations communities in the region and has committed to explore the implications of formally adopting UNDRIP as a local government.

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