

Date: 2023-11-03

Subject: **Sacred Fires at Meadowland Park (Ward 3)**

Contact: **Andrew von Holt, Deputy Fire Chief, Brampton Fire and Emergency Services**

Report Number: Brampton Fire and Emergency Services-2023-962

Recommendations:

Aligned with responding to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action #43 and United Nations Declarations on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Article 12.1. recognizing and working with the local Indigenous community to re-establish a site for the use of a ceremonial Sacred Fire is viewed as a necessary and meaningful action in response to the City of Brampton's commitment. It is recommended that Council enact a by-law to amend the Open-Air Burning By-law 91-94 to support these Calls to Action, by approving the following recommendations:

1. That the report titled Sacred Fires at Meadowland Park (Ward 3) to the Committee of Council Meeting, dated November 3, 2023 be received;
2. That Council enact By-law XXXX, being an amendment to the By-law 91-94 (Open Air Fires) to provide for an exemption for the holding of Ceremonial or Sacred Fires for Indigenous Groups; and
3. That staff continue to work with the Indigenous Groups regarding the holding of Ceremonial or Sacred Fires in the City of Brampton.

Overview:

- At the direction from Council, staff is taking steps in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action to redress the harms caused by colonization and the impacts of the residential school system.
- Recognizing that Indigenous Peoples have an inherent right to conduct Sacred Fires for healing and ceremonial purposes, City staff has been working with The Indigenous Network to determine a suitable location and plan to facilitate the holding of Sacred Fires.

- City staff recognizes the rights of the Indigenous community in Brampton to manifest, practise, develop, and teach their spiritual and religious traditions, customs, and ceremonies; the right to maintain, protect, and have access in privacy to their religious and cultural sites; the right to the use and control of their ceremonial objects; and the right to the repatriation of their human remains.
- Staff will provide a designated location in Meadowland Park where Indigenous groups can hold Sacred Fires. This collaboration prioritizes community safety and has worked closely to establish a non-combustible storage unit with appropriate supplies.
- Indigenous groups will have access to the storage unit and supplies to support the use of a sacred fire when needed.
- To ensure community safety remains a priority, City staff will incorporate an internal notification system to advise when sacred fires will be held.

Background:

The Government of Canada created the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) as a result of a class action lawsuit in 2007 as a way to examine the full magnitude of harm caused by Canadian residential schools and to make recommendations and solutions that would stop future abuses of Indigenous communities.

The Commission's mandate was to inform all Canadians about what happened in residential schools and in 2015, the TRC released their final report. Over a six-year span, the TRC heard from more than 6,500 witnesses including survivors, their families, communities, and anyone personally affected by the residential school experience. In June 2015, the TRC presented a final summary in Ottawa containing 94 Calls to Action aimed at redressing the Indigenous Reconciliation efforts across Canada.

These Calls to Action include all levels of government and cover a wide range of government responsibilities including child welfare, education, language and culture, health, justice, commemoration, museums and archives, and training for public servants.

In March 2020, Brampton City Council accepted a [report](#) and provided staff directives to carry out in response to the TRC Calls to Action and redress the harms caused by colonization and the impacts of residential school.

For the purposes of this report, TRC Call to Action #43 states: We call upon federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal governments to fully adopt and implement the

United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as the framework for reconciliation.

In relation to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples this report includes Article 12.1. which further states: Indigenous Peoples have the right to manifest, practise, develop and teach their spiritual and religious traditions, customs and ceremonies; the right to maintain, protect, and have access in privacy to their religious and cultural sites; the right to the use and control of their ceremonial objects; and the right to the repatriation of their human remains.

Sacred Fires are one of many significant Indigenous ceremonies that were banned between 1884 and 1951 as a result of colonization. Sacred Fires were reinstated when changes to the Indian Act recognized religious freedom as an inherent right of Indigenous People.

These ceremonies are experienced by Indigenous People as healing and grounding as well as a connection of community and all of creation. Going forward and in the spirit of reconciliation, City staff will continue working to permanently reinstate Sacred Fires in the City of Brampton.

Current Situation:

The City of Brampton does not allow an open fire to occur unless a permit has been issued. Lack of process and by-law restrictions continue to prohibit the use of Ceremonial/Sacred Fires in many municipal frameworks and can be redressed to ensure that meaningful, lasting and impactful actions are taken in response to the City's commitment to the TRC Calls to Action.

The creation of a designated Ceremonial/Sacred Fire site in a City of Brampton Park supports articles in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Calls to Action in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Final Report. This addresses the need to reduce barriers for Indigenous People holding Sacred Fires.

The City recognizes the inherent rights of Indigenous Peoples to hold Ceremonial or Sacred Fires. To recognize these rights, while prioritizing community safety, a notification system to the City will be implemented and managed by the Indigenous Network to support Indigenous community members with utilizing and sharing these spaces. This notification system will ensure City staff are well informed of Sacred Fires occurring.

The designated Sacred Fire site selected is Meadowland Park. This site was selected through collaboration with Indigenous Network and City staff. Safety concerns will be addressed through processes as agreed upon between Brampton Fire & Emergency Services and the Indigenous Network.

The City will provide a locked non-combustible storage unit at site containing the supplies to support sacred fires as needed by the Indigenous Groups.

Corporate Implications:

Financial Implications:

The City has purchased a bunker for the storage of supplies, and an ash box. Capital expenses of \$7,200 have already been incurred and absorbed in the Parks budget.

Legal Implications

By-law Amendment

The Open Fires By-law 91-94 prohibits the holding of open-air fires without a permit issued by the Fire Chief, or unless it falls within an exemption to the by-law.

The proposed amendment to the by-law would remove the permitting and other requirements, thereby taking meaningful action to support the Calls to Action

Communications Implications

Staff is working with Strategic Communications on an engagement and communications strategy to advise residents on Sacred Fires.

Strategic Focus Area: Culture and Diversity

Allowing Sacred fires in a dedicated location in Meadowlands Park supports and enhances the holistic framework that makes up Brampton.

Conclusion:

Aligned with responding to the TRC Calls to Action #43 and UNDRIP Article 12.1. recognizing and working with the local Indigenous community to re-establish a site for the use of a ceremonial Sacred Fire is viewed as a necessary and meaningful action in response to the City of Brampton's commitment. It is recommended that Council enact a by-law to amend the Open-Air Burning By-law 91-94 to support these Calls to Action.

Authored by:

Reviewed by:

Andrew von Holt, Deputy Fire Chief

Bill Boyes, Commissioner, Community Services

Approved by:

Bill Boyes
Commissioner, Community Services

Approved by:

Marlon Kallideen
Chief Administrative Officer

Attachments:

- Attachment 1 – Draft Amending By-law to By-law 91-94, Open Air Fires