

Standing Committee Report

REPORT NUMBER 070-2026-Growth-Strategy & Engagement

DATE

PREPARED

December 27, 2025

FILE

STANDING

COMMITTEE

January 27, 2026

MEETING DATE

SUBJECT

2025 Indigenous Relations Annual Report

PURPOSE To provide the Quality-of-Life Standing Committee with an annual update on the Indigenous Relation Section activities and outcomes, including progress on the Seven Youth Inquest recommendations.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides an update on the Indigenous Relations Section activities and outcomes for the period of 2020–2025, with a primary focus on progress achieved in 2025. Since adoption of the Indigenous Relations & Inclusion Strategy (2020) and the Maamawe – Growing Together Strategic Plan (2023–2027), the City has continued to advance reconciliation, relationship-building, and systemic change across municipal operations.

Key outcomes during the reporting period include:

- Continued implementation and institutionalization of the Seven Youth Inquest recommendations
- Strengthened bipartite and multiparty relationships with Indigenous partners
- Re-establishment and operationalization of the Indigenous Advisory Council (IAC)
- Implementation of the Sacred Fire Ceremonial Policy
- Advancement of Indigenous Cultural Awareness Training (ICAT) across the corporation
- Proclamation of Indigenous Survivors Day (June 30)

This report confirms that reconciliation-related work remains active across multiple departments, with most initiatives embedded into standard operating practices.

With renewed leadership in place and recruitment underway, the Indigenous Relations Section is positioned to sustain momentum, complete deferred work, and resume regular annual reporting.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

The City of Thunder Bay acknowledges that meaningful and sustained Indigenous-municipal relations are foundational to building a more equitable, inclusive, and prosperous community. The City's Indigenous Relations & Inclusion Strategy was developed in direct response to the Thunder Bay Anti-Racism & Inclusion Accord and through extensive engagement with local First Nations, Métis, and urban Indigenous partners.

The Strategy reflects the City's commitment to address historical and contemporary inequities rooted in colonialism and systemic racism, and to strengthen relationships with Indigenous Peoples as rights holders, partners, and contributors to civic life.

Guided by the Indigenous Advisory Council and local Indigenous community partners, the Indigenous Relations & Inclusion Strategy sets a framework for advancing Indigenous inclusion across municipal policies, programs, and services. Its core pillars include Respectful Relations, Responsive City, Education and Inclusion, and Indigenous-Community Prosperity. These pillars provide direction for corporate actions that affirm Indigenous rights and cultural protocols, enhance cultural awareness and anti-racism within municipal operations, and promote equitable access to opportunities and services for Indigenous residents.

This work aligns with broader municipal reconciliation efforts reflected in provincial practice. For example, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario's (AMO) Indigenous Reconciliation Action Plan underscores the role of municipalities in advancing reconciliation, honouring Indigenous rights, and fostering reciprocal relationships with Indigenous governments, communities, and organizations. AMO's framework emphasizes education, respectful partnerships, economic reconciliation, inclusion, and systems-level policy change; principles that are foundational to our Strategy.

Through implementation of the Indigenous Relations and Inclusion Strategy, the City continues to embed Indigenous perspectives into its corporate culture, improve municipal responsiveness to Indigenous priorities, and build shared prosperity with Indigenous partners. Annual implementation plans, informed by community feedback and engagement, enable progress tracking and strengthen the Corporation's accountability to its commitments to reconciliation and inclusion.

Key Outcomes Since 2020

1. Relationship Agreements and Indigenous Partnerships

The City continues to maintain and strengthen relationships with Indigenous partners through both formal agreements and relationship-based collaboration.

Formal agreements include:

- **Fort William First Nation – Declaration of Commitment**
Ongoing joint table meetings support coordinated work on archaeology, land-use planning, infrastructure projects, and cultural site protection.
- **Thunder Bay District Métis Council, Métis Nation of Ontario – Memorandum of Understanding**
A revised MOU is under legal review, with signing anticipated in the latter part of 2026.
- **North Caribou Lake First Nation – Friendship Agreement**
Renewal efforts are planned to be revisited as capacity is restored.

Relationship-based partnerships and ongoing collaboration continues with:

- Red Sky Métis Independent Nation
- Nishnawbe Aski Nation
- Anishinabek Nation

These partnerships support effective engagement and project coordination beyond formal agreements.

2. Indigenous Advisory Council (IAC)

The Indigenous Advisory Council was fully re-established in late 2024 and has continued with regular meetings through 2025.

Key achievements include:

- Adoption of updated Terms of Reference, including formal ratification ceremony with City Council and Executive Leadership
- Appointment of new members
- Cultural guidance on City initiatives, events, and public spaces
- Fellowship meeting with City Council and Executive Leadership
- Presentation to Committee of the Whole highlighting role of IAC, key involvement and perspective to inform City decision-making, initiatives and events

The IAC continues to provide strategic advice on reconciliation, cultural safety, and Indigenous inclusion across City operations

3. Indigenous Cultural Awareness Training (ICAT)

As of this reporting period:

- 51.63% of City staff have completed ICAT

Work is underway to expand training capacity and accelerate participation.

Actions underway include:

- Expansion of facilitator roster through an Expression of Interest process
- Review of training content and evaluation tools in partnership with the IAC
- Development of pre- and post-training assessments

4. Anti-Racism and Inclusion Accord

The City remains a signatory to the Thunder Bay Anti-Racism and Inclusion Accord. Progress includes:

- Launch of the Accord website
- Development of a Resource Guide for signatories
- Recruitment of 25 new signatories with support from the Thunder Bay Chamber of Commerce

A comprehensive internal implementation plan is currently under development, with the Accord Implementation Working Group anticipated to resume in 2026.

5. Environmental Scan – Key Findings and Initial Observations

A comprehensive environmental scan and policy review was conducted to examine reconciliation and decolonization approaches across municipal and institutional contexts, including:

- Review of reconciliation, decolonization, and Indigenous engagement policies across Canadian municipalities and institutions
- Analysis of public-facing reports, action plans, and related media
- Identification of recurring themes, gaps, and effective practices

Key findings indicate that effective reconciliation efforts are grounded in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action, increasingly aligned with UNDRIP, and strengthened through meaningful Indigenous community engagement. The scan also identified the importance of actionable, measurable commitments, local and regional context (including the Seven Youth Inquest), and the need to revisit municipal policies and procedures to address systemic barriers and racism affecting Indigenous peoples

6. Seven Youth Inquest

The City continues to implement all 31 recommendations from the Seven Youth Inquest.

Internal assessment results:

- 2 recommendations completed as one-time actions
- 10 recommendations maintained as ongoing actions
- 19 recommendations embedded into standard operating procedures

This demonstrates that 94% of recommendations are institutionalized or ongoing. One recommendation remains in progress and is prioritized for completion.

Annual reporting to City Council and engagement with Nishnawbe Aski Nation will continue.

Appendix B – “Seven Youth Inquest Actioned Recommendations” is included with this report with further progress details on all recommendations that the City is a named party to.

7. Indigenous Space, Place, and Visibility

Significant initiatives include:

- Implementation of the Sacred Fire Ceremonial Policy
- Survivors’ Reflection Space at Hillcrest Park
- Maamawe Family Day Pow Wow
- Revitalization planning for the Healing Medicine Garden
- Proclamation of Indigenous Survivors Day (June 30)

The City continues to support Indigenous cultural events, commemorative days, and community-led initiatives.

2026 Key Priorities

In 2026, the City will continue to build on progress achieved to date and focus on strengthening capacity, consistency, and delivery across all work. Key priorities include:

- Full staffing of the Indigenous Relations Section to support sustained delivery and regular annual reporting.
- Completion of Accord implementation planning in conjunction with Community Safety & Well-Being Section
- Expansion of ICAT and increased training pathways
- Resumption of regular annual reporting
- Renewal of deferred relationship agreements
- Continued implementation and reporting on the Seven Youth Inquest recommendations

CONSULTATION (optional heading for staff – delete if not required)

The Indigenous Relations Section work is informed by ongoing consultation with Indigenous communities, organizations, and leaders, as well as guidance from cultural knowledge keepers and Elders. Input from local First Nations, Métis, and urban Indigenous partners has been integral to shaping initiatives, policies, and programs.

Regular engagement activities include:

- **Regular meetings with Fort William First Nation (FWFN):** Consultation and coordination on City initiatives, infrastructure, and cultural site considerations
- **Monthly meetings with the Indigenous Advisory Council (IAC):** Feedback considered and incorporated into City initiatives, policies, and protocols
- **Internal departmental engagement:** Supports integration of Indigenous perspectives into municipal policies, programs, processes and services

Consultation outcomes have and continue to inform City initiatives and ongoing work related to the Seven Youth Inquest. Continuous, culturally appropriate engagement mechanisms ensure Indigenous partners' voices guide City priorities.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATION

There are no immediate financial implications associated with this report. All activities are managed within the approved Indigenous Relations budget.

BACKGROUND

On August 10, 2020, Committee of the Whole approved the City of Thunder Bay's Fourth Annual Report as contained in Report R 93/2020 (Corporate Strategic Services) on the Seven Youth Inquest for submission to the Ontario Chief Coroner.

On June 24, 2019, Committee of the Whole approved the City of Thunder Bay's Third Annual Report as contained in Report R 108/2019 (Corporate Strategic Services) on the Seven Youth Inquest for submission to the Ontario Chief Coroner.

On June 25, 2018, Committee of the Whole approved the City of Thunder Bay's Second Annual Report as contained in Report R 82/2018 (Corporate Strategic Services) on the Seven Youth Inquest for submission to the Ontario Chief Coroner.

On June 12, 2017, Committee of the Whole approved the City of Thunder Bay's First Annual Report as contained in Report R 61/2017 (Corporate Strategic Services) on the Seven Youth Inquest for submission to the Ontario Chief Coroner.

REFERENCE MATERIAL ATTACHED

Appendix A- Actioned Commitments under the Indigenous Relations & Inclusion Strategy

Appendix B- Seven Youth Inquest Actioned Recommendations

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REPORT SIGNED AND VERIFIED BY

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Date (01/19/2026)