



## 2017 Declared A Year of Reconciliation

Date: Thursday, June 30, 2016

For Immediate Release

Victoria, BC – The City of Victoria will celebrate Canada's 150<sup>th</sup> sesquicentennial in 2017 and has adopted '2017: A Year of Reconciliation' as a theme to guide celebrations and events through the year.

The Capital City will ring in the 2017 sesquicentennial year with a community celebration on New Year's eve. Canada 150 events will be coordinated with the Greater Victoria Spirit Committee Society - chaired by former Mayor Alan Lowe working alongside community representatives from several community agencies - to design a detailed program, coordinate grant applications and develop concepts for legacy projects for the 150th celebrations.

"Reconciliation is more than words. It is about understanding the past and deepening connections between the City and the Songhees and Esquimalt Nations on whose territory we reside," said Mayor Lisa Helps.

"Reconciliation means changing our practices and the landscape of the city to honour the past and create the future with our First Nations partners."

The 150th anniversary of Canada is an opportunity for the City of Victoria and residents throughout the region to demonstrate our local ongoing commitment to Reconciliation. Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission said that "knowing the truth about what happened in residential schools in and of itself does not necessarily lead to reconciliation", and that action is needed beyond recognition.

"From my perspective, the City of Victoria's Year of Reconciliation 2017 is a sincere effort to build genuine relationships for the benefit of all of us," noted Chief Ron Sam, Songhees First Nation. "We are appreciative that the City of Victoria has reached out to work with us in a meaningful way. We welcome new opportunities to learn from one another. With collaborative efforts, we can achieve anything we put our hearts and minds to."

Esquimalt Nation Chief Andy Thomas, Esquimalt First Nation, acknowledges the City's commitment to a year of recognition, reconciliation and action. Esquimalt Nation expresses their openness to continue discussion on the reconciliation process.

The City of Victoria has begun this journey of reconciliation, and the history and culture of the Songhees and Esquimalt Nations is evident in many ways across the City. Spindle whorls are displayed throughout the city marking important places in Lekwungen territory, recognizing the economic trading history of the First Nations in this region. Victoria's Spirit Square, honouring local First Nations' history, occupies the western half of City Hall's Centennial Square precinct.

Land for re-burial of First Nations remains has been set aside on traditional lands of the Lekwungen People, in what is now Beacon Hill Park, and work is underway for the Esquimalt and Songhees People to soon construct a traditional longhouse atop Beacon Hill.

City Council will soon begin quarterly meetings with both Esquimalt and Songhees Chiefs and their Councils. In addition, public meetings at City Hall begin by recognizing that Council deliberations take place on the traditional territories of the Songhees and Esquimalt People and City Hall meeting rooms bear the names of the Songhees

and Esquimalt Nations. The language of all City Proclamations recognizes the City of Victoria in the traditional territories of the Esquimalt and Songhees First Nations.

Victoria City Hall was the first to publicly display the 'Witness Blanket', made from hundreds of items reclaimed from Residential Schools, churches, government buildings and traditional and cultural structures from across Canada, created as a national monument to recognize the atrocities of the Indian Residential School era, honour the children, and symbolize ongoing reconciliation.

Embracing 2017 as a *Year of Reconciliation* in Victoria will bring many more opportunities to recognize and take action on Reconciliation with local First Nations.

— 30 —

**For More Information:**

Mayor Lisa Helps

City of Victoria

Cellular: 250.661.2708

lhelps@victoria.ca