



## Victoria Commences its Witness Reconciliation Program

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For Immediate Release

VICTORIA, BC — On January 1, 2017 at the City of Victoria's annual New Year's Day Levee, and in the presence of local First Nations, City Council proclaimed 2017 a Year of Reconciliation. Since that time, Council has been in conversation with the Chiefs of the Songhees and Esquimalt Nations on how best to approach the work of Reconciliation.

Together, the City and the Esquimalt and Songhees Nations have created a program reflecting Indigenous family witness ceremonies. The City's Witness Reconciliation Program brings together Indigenous Witnesses from both the Songhees and Esquimalt Nations' Councils and a City Family. The Program is meant to be a fluid process -- one that is flexible, adaptable and evolves to foster a long-term relationship between the City and its Indigenous partners.

"We look forward to working together with the Songhees and Esquimalt Nations on a new path of Reconciliation," said Mayor Lisa Helps. "As we have learned from Esquimalt and Songhees Chiefs, Reconciliation begins with listening and deepening understanding, and is a living process of collaboration, imagination and action. Recognizing the depth of our work together, and the need to respect Indigenous traditions in doing that work, we understand that 2017 is the first of our years of Reconciliation."

The Witness Reconciliation Program will focus on building and nurturing the relationships needed to facilitate trust and demonstrate the City's ongoing commitment to doing the work for as long as it needs to be done.

"Reconciliation is a journey honouring the truth and reconciling the future. It is about respect, both self-respect for Aboriginal people and mutual respect among all Canadians. Reconciliation must become a way of life," said Songhees Nation Chief Ron Sam. "Songhees Nation welcomes the opportunity to work with the City through the time needed to nurture our current and future relationship, to take action, together, in the spirit of Reconciliation, and with respect for our traditional ways."

Esquimalt Nation Chief Andy Thomas acknowledged the City's commitment to an ongoing course of truth-telling, reconciliation and action, and the City's willingness to embrace a different way of working together. "Esquimalt Nation expresses their openness to continue working with the City on a meaningful reconciliation process," said Chief Andy Thomas.

The Indigenous Witnesses will be the Chief and Councillors of the Songhees and Esquimalt Nations, who have been chosen by their people as leaders. The Witnesses will provide guidance and oversight for the Program, coming together two to three times a year in a traditional Witness Ceremony to hear, reflect, comment and advise, witnessing and guiding how the Program moves forward.

The City Family will meet regularly to collaboratively generate ideas that lead to a program of actions. This program will be presented to the Witnesses through a Witness Ceremony. The City Family will initially be comprised of Songhees representative Brianna Dick, Esquimalt representative Katie Hooper, noted artist Carey Newman, Camosun College Indigenous Studies Chair Janice Simcoe, Mayor Lisa Helps, Councillor Charlayne Thornton-Joe and Councillor Marianne Alto. Staff support will vary as needed, starting initially with Director of Parks, Recreation and Facilities Thomas Soulliere and Manager of Executive Operations Colleen Mycroft.

After the advice of Witnesses is heard at each Witness Ceremony, the City Family will facilitate actions to realize the ideas endorsed by the Witnesses. Subsequent Witness Ceremonies will provide an opportunity for reflection and to look forward to future actions.

“As a corporation, we have not done this kind of work before,” said City of Victoria Councillor Marianne Alto. “The work is new to us and so will be the way we do the work.”

The first Witness Ceremony took place this morning at the Royal BC Museum, timed with the start of the Aboriginal Cultural Festival that runs until Sunday.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s (TRC’s) Calls to Action, findings and materials will provide context and a framework for the City of Victoria’s Witness Reconciliation Program, its participants and its work. The Program will consider how the City might respond to the five recommendations highlighted by the TRC for municipalities, and will also work to realize, on a local scale, the TRC’s mandate to tell Canadians what happened in the Indian Residential Schools, create a permanent record of what happened in the Indian Residential Schools, and foster healing and reconciliation.

**ATTACHMENT: Councillor Motion  
Biographies of External Appointees  
Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Principles of Reconciliation  
Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Action for Municipal Governments**

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