



## New Library, New Name -- Community Helps Name New Branch in James Bay

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For Immediate Release

VICTORIA, BC — Victoria City Council has selected **sx<sup>w</sup>enx<sup>w</sup>əŋ təŋəx<sup>w</sup> James Bay Branch** as the name for the new Greater Victoria Public Library that will open in early spring. Pronounced *s-hweng hw-ung tongue-oo-hw*, **sx<sup>w</sup>enx<sup>w</sup>əŋ təŋəx<sup>w</sup>** is the Lekwungen name for James Bay.

There was strong support from the community during the *Name That Library* campaign to name the new branch a local First Nations name and to consult the Songhees and Esquimalt Nations on a suitable name. In consultation with the two local Nations, the name **sx<sup>w</sup>enx<sup>w</sup>əŋ təŋəx<sup>w</sup> James Bay Branch** was selected.

City Council has also named the library's two meeting rooms the **Dr. Elmer Seniemten George M.S.M. Community Room** (pronounced *Sen-eem-ten*), and the **Mifflin Wistar Gibbs Study Room** (pronounced *Wis-ter*).

The Songhees and Esquimalt Nations jointly put forward Dr. Elmer Seniemten George's name to honour the Songhees Elder, who is one of the few remaining fluent speakers of Lekwungen, a dialect of the Northern Straits Salish Peoples. He stewards the survival not only of the language, but also of the traditional teachings and culture embedded in the words.

In 2016, Elder Elmer Seniemten George received an honorary degree from Royal Roads University. In 2017, he was awarded the Meritorious Service Medal (MSM) from the Governor General of Canada for his work with Elder John Elliott in translating the Douglas Treaties of the mid-1850s into the SENĆOŦEN First Nations languages. This work has shed light on the lack of understanding that existed when the treaties were first signed and has provided a foundation for reconciliation.

City Council honoured the collaborative contributions of Mifflin Wistar Gibbs by naming the library's study room after this James Bay resident and local merchant, who served as a Victoria City Councillor from 1866 - 1869. In 2016, the City declared November 19 "Mifflin Wistar Gibbs Day" in honour of Gibbs becoming the first black person elected to public office in British Columbia the same day in 1866. The BC Black History Awareness Society and members of the community submitted his name for consideration.

Of the current 11 branches in the Greater Victoria Public Library system, four have commemorative names and seven reflect geographic locations. The **sx<sup>w</sup>enx<sup>w</sup>əŋ təŋəx<sup>w</sup> James Bay Branch** will be the second branch in Victoria and the 12th in the Greater Victoria Public Library system.

The City received 623 name submissions from the public through the *Name That Library* campaign. Of these, 493 submissions suggested a name other than "James Bay Branch". There was greatest support for a First Nations name, with 157 name submissions and 43 unique names submitted, with many suggesting the City consult with local First Nations on a suitable name. Commemorative person names were next, with 124 name submissions and 52 unique names submitted. Geographic location names (other than "James Bay Branch") included 79 name submissions with 50 unique names submitted.

The sx̱weŋx̱wəŋ təŋəx̱w James Bay Branch is set to open in early spring. For more information and to hear the library name pronounced by Elder Dr. Elmer Seniemten George, visit: [www.gvpl.ca](http://www.gvpl.ca) and click on the illustration of the new library.

**Quotes:**

Mayor Lisa Helps, City of Victoria:

"We very much appreciate the community's participation in the *Name That Library* campaign. It was a tough decision, but with the City's ongoing work towards Reconciliation, and the library being situated on the traditional lands of the Lekwungen people, Council felt it was most fitting to name the new branch the Lekwungen name for this area. We are also pleased to honour the contributions of Elder Dr. Elmer Seniemten George and Mifflin Wistar Gibbs in naming the two meeting rooms."

Chief Andy Thomas, Esquimalt Nation:

"I think naming part of the new library after Elder Dr. Elmer George (Seniemten in Lekwungen) is a great gesture. I think sometimes people wait for someone to pass away first before they dedicate a building and I think he would be honoured. Doing this while Elmer is still alive is a sign of respect and acknowledges his work keeping our language alive."

Chief Ron Sam, Songhees Nation:

"In the Lekwungen language, sx̱weŋx̱wəŋ təŋəx̱w is how our ancestors knew the land now called James Bay. I welcome the recognition of that history by the City of Victoria as it names the new James Bay library the sx̱weŋx̱wəŋ təŋəx̱w branch. I also appreciate that Elder Dr. Elmer Seniemten George will be honoured for his tireless work to preserve and revive the Lekwungen languages, by the City naming a community gathering room for Seniemten."

Elder Dr. Elmer Seniemten George:

"It is a great honour to have my name associated with a place of lifelong learning and language."

Mavis DeGirolamo, Past President, BC Black History Awareness Society:

"We are pleased to be a part of the naming of a study room in honour of Mifflin Wistar Gibbs, Victoria's first black City Councillor who was a representative of James Bay. We thank Mayor Helps and Council for this honour, and are sure his surviving family members will be thrilled with this recognition of a fine man who believed strongly in the values espoused by our City – equality, fairness, lifelong learning and community involvement."

Rob Martin, Board Chair, Greater Victoria Public Library:

"Libraries are vibrant and inclusive community hubs where people come to learn, to create and to connect with others. We are proud to add the new sx̱weŋx̱wəŋ təŋəx̱w James Bay Branch to the library system in early 2018, and to recognize two extraordinary individuals: Elder Dr. Elmer Seniemten George and Mifflin Wistar Gibbs."

**ATTACHMENTS:** Bios for Elder Dr. Elmer Seniemten George and Mifflin Wistar Gibbs

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**For More Information:**

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