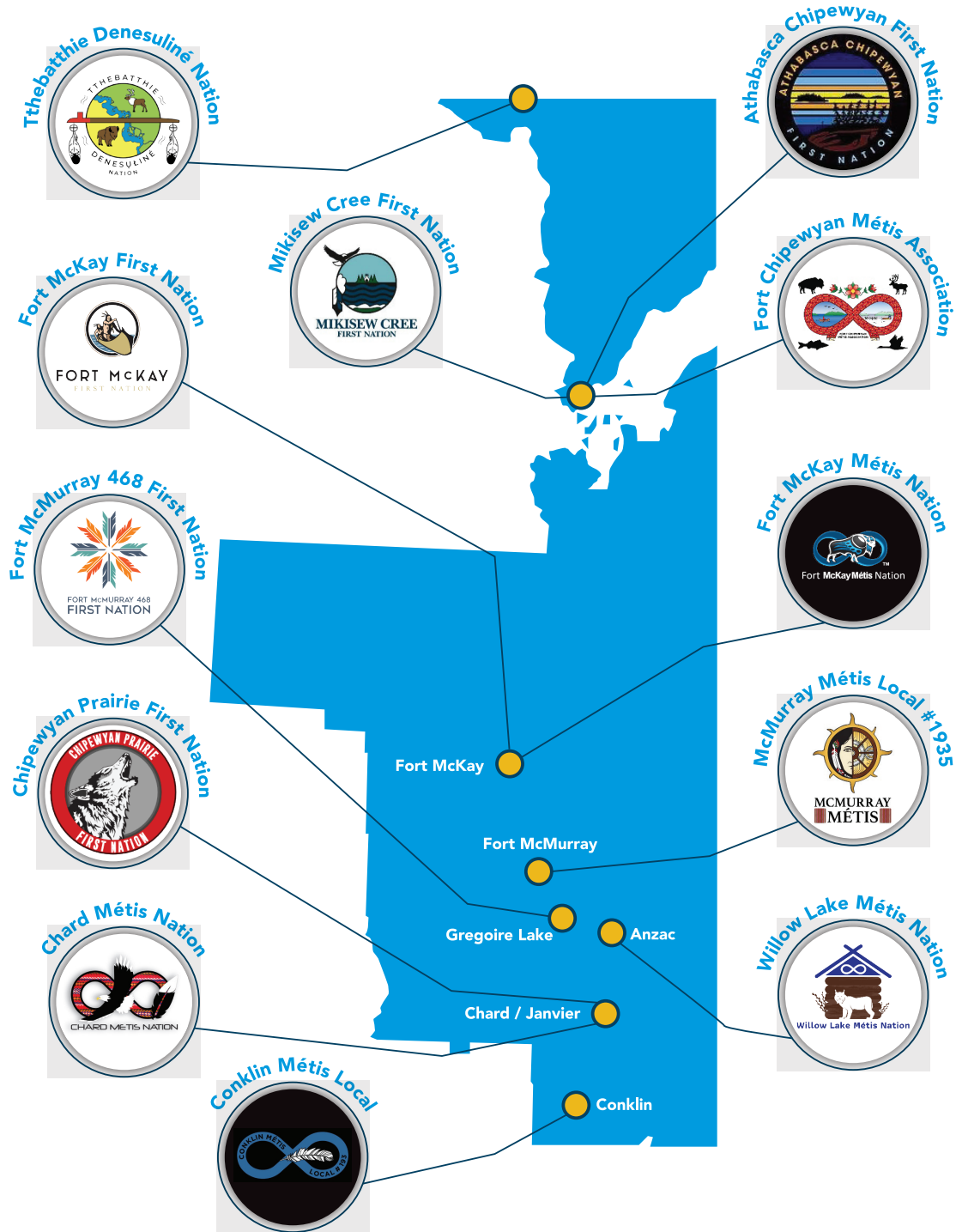


A COLLABORATIVE **PATHWAY FORWARD**

LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

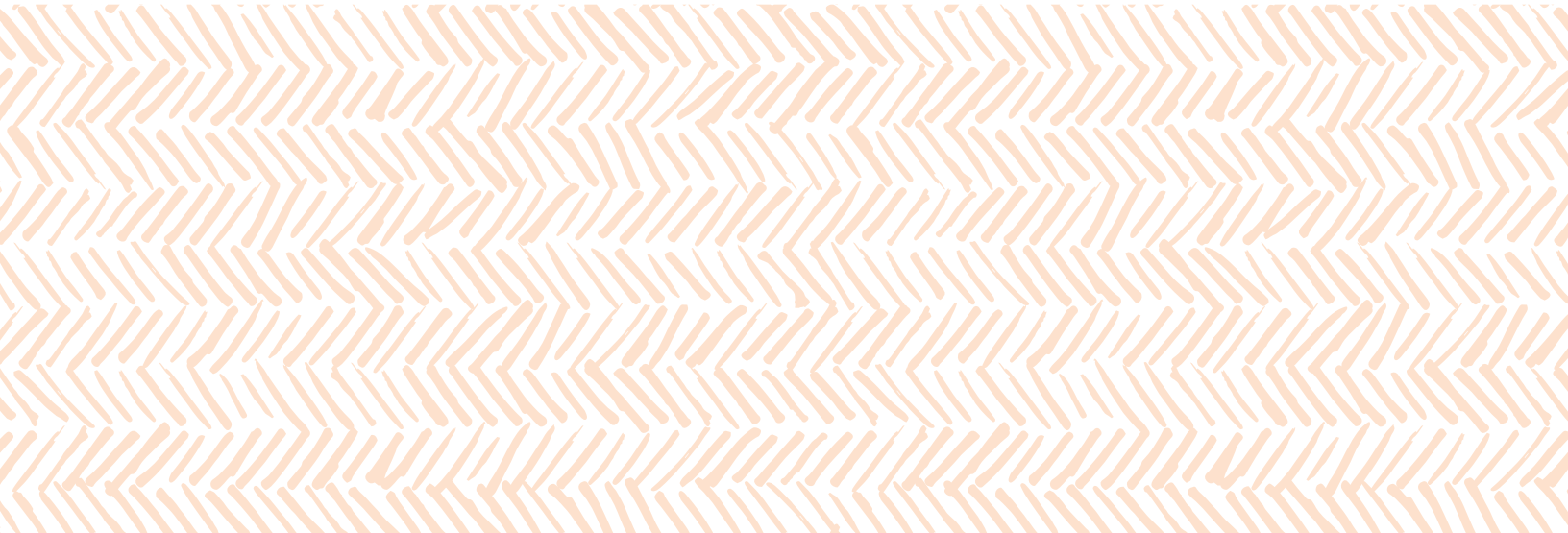


With gratitude, the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo acknowledges this land is Treaty 8 Territory, the traditional lands of the Cree, Dene, and the unceded territory of the Métis people.



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ON THE COVER

About the Cover Art: Spirits Having Flown - Series 1, 2 & 3

Each time people walk through the door to enter or egress Council Chambers, they do so while walking through the symbols of the 7 Sacred Teachings. At the bottom of the side paintings are symbols for the Sacred Pipe and Sage, with the colours of the 4 directions of both the Dene and the Cree people. The Pipe is not burning tobacco represents how some of our cultural things have been taken away, but the Sage burns, representing that we have started along our own healing paths.

Reconciliation is not just an Aboriginal thing; we all have to do this together, no matter what walk of life you live in and come from. Reconciliation is about all of us! – Frederick R. McDonald

About the Artist: Frederick R. McDonald



Frederick R. McDonald is an artist and a member of the Fort McKay First Nation. Frederick followed his dream to be an artist by attending the University of Calgary, graduating with a Master of Fine Arts degree in 2001. While in university, he took on many challenges such as President of the First Nations Student Association, and by participating in other organizations like the Rainforest Action Group and the Committee Against Racism, giving him insights to different ways of seeing.

Frederick was born in Fort McMurray and raised in the bush along the Athabasca River and was brought up in the traditional hunting and trapping lifestyle of his parents. A way of life that still lives inside him.

Despite traveling all over the world, Fred's heart is still with his community. He's had many roles over the years and found personal satisfaction as the Fort McKay Treaty Days coordinator and as the Athabasca Tribal Council Regional Gathering director. Always a leader, Fred served as the President of the Northern Alberta Aboriginal Business Association and has also had many board appointments including the Fort McMurray United Way.

As the CEO of the Fort McKay Group of Companies for four years, beginning this posting in 2008, he learned how to use his left brain more efficiently and says he saw firsthand how the corporate environment dynamics work. This adds another level of thinking when it comes to artistic perspectives.

Fred has returned to being an artist; it's where his heart has always been. He has had many exhibitions across Canada and has been collected by individuals and corporations from all parts of the world, including many institutions like the Glenbow Museum, The Alberta Arts Foundation, and the Government of Canada.

Fred loves painting but has also taken to poetry and photography equally. Being an artist, he says, he has an esoteric relationship with the cosmos, but mainly...art is life!

ABOUT THE 2024 ANNUAL REPORT



In 2021, the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo formalized its response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's (TRC) 94 Calls to Action. Identifying 29 Calls to Action as a roadmap, *A Collaborative Pathway Forward* laid the foundation of the Municipality's efforts to reconcile and renew relationships with the Indigenous Peoples and communities in Wood Buffalo. In doing so, the Municipality also committed to providing annual updates on its progress. Please refer to the original *A Collaborative Pathway Forward* for a note on terminology used in this update and all previous reports, as well as for a more comprehensive look back on the Municipality's path towards reconciliation.

With an additional three Calls to Action adopted following the 2023 Annual Update, the Municipality has identified a total of 33 Calls to Action as areas it can work on directly or influence through advocacy or collaboration. A list of RMWB-adopted Calls to Action can be found on Page 6. For the comprehensive list of all TRC Calls to Action, please visit the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation's website at www.nctr.ca.

This update also includes a comprehensive review of the Protocol Agreement program. First introduced in 2022 to facilitate and formalize relationships, 11 out of the 12 Indigenous communities in the region have signed on to the program. Those nations have also participated in the Indigenous Community Capacity Funding grant program, which was introduced as part of the program to address capacity concerns raised during engagement. The program was intended to formalize and facilitate government-to-government relationships between the Municipality and Indigenous communities.

MESSAGE FROM DENNIS FRASER, DIRECTOR OF INDIGENOUS AND RURAL RELATIONS

tansi, edlanete, and hello. I am pleased to present the third update to *A Collaborative Pathway Forward*, the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo's formal response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's 94 Calls to Action. This journey began four years ago with the introduction of that initial report. The groundwork began even further ago, with the direction from Council in 2016 to identify how the Municipality would implement the TRC Calls to Action.

However, the larger journey started even before that. It began with the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, with the dark history and ugly truths of the Government of Canada and the Catholic Church, with first contact, and with the Indigenous Peoples who have called this land their home since time immemorial. Our shared history is an intricate web, one we are all responsible for acknowledging and reconciling.

With the mindset that every one of us has a role to play in reconciliation, the Municipality made organizational changes intended to put reconciliation into action. In September, Rural Operations was transitioned from Public Works into the Indigenous and Rural Relations (IRR) department—centralizing municipal staff and resources working in or travelling to rural and Indigenous communities. This significant shift ensures that local customs and traditions are respected in day-to-day operations, that rural perspectives guide decision-making, and that community needs are met with the responsive attention they deserve.

At the same time, recognizing that Fort Chipewyan has historically felt overlooked, additional steps were taken in 2024 to ensure more focused and culturally aligned services for the community. A dedicated Manager position was established to provide localized

leadership and oversight. The Municipality also launched a review of job descriptions, created preventative maintenance plans, and restructured roles and responsibilities to ensure efficient, responsive service delivery rooted in local priorities and values. These actions reflect the Municipality's ongoing commitment to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action and the Council's Strategic Plan priority of Rural and Indigenous Communities and Partnerships.

This work also includes ongoing asset assessments, community engagement, and feedback-informed service planning, reinforcing the commitment to a culturally responsive approach. These efforts ensure that municipal services in Fort Chipewyan are not only consistent with the Municipality's reconciliation commitments but also meet the unique needs of the community. Together, these actions reflect a deeper organizational shift toward reconciliation in action, equitable service standards, and strengthened partnerships with local Indigenous communities.

This answers a call that IRR has put out in recent years – that truth and reconciliation needs to be an organization-wide priority with input, participation, and shared responsibility across all departments and at all levels. The need for this isn't new, but it has certainly been highlighted over recent years, particularly in times of disaster and emergency, but also in the more mundane details in the day-to-day. More than ever before, people across the organization are "getting it" – we are fielding more requests for guidance from Elders and Knowledge Keepers than ever before, more people are initiating land acknowledgments at the onset of meetings, and – perhaps most importantly –

people across this organization are having the tough conversations and asking the important questions. It is a reminder that while truth and reconciliation exists in the form of 94 complex and government-specific Calls to Action, it also exists on a smaller, more personal level. We can advance reconciliation every day with small but impactful acts.

That is the message and challenge I want to leave with all readers: what small acts can you take today to advance reconciliation? The more we keep truth and reconciliation top of mind every day, not just on the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, the more we can collaborate and work together to make reconciliation a reality.

kinanâskomitin, marsi cho, thank you,

Dennis Fraser



ADOPTED CALLS TO ACTION

1. We call upon the federal, provincial, territorial, and Aboriginal governments to commit to reducing the number of Aboriginal children in care by:
 - i. Monitoring and assessing neglect investigations.
 - ii. Providing adequate resources to enable Aboriginal communities and child-welfare organizations to keep Aboriginal families together where it is safe to do so, and to keep children in culturally appropriate environments, regardless of where they reside.
 - iii. Ensuring that social workers and others who conduct child-welfare investigations are properly educated and trained about the history and impacts of residential schools.
 - iv. Ensuring that social workers and others who conduct child-welfare investigations are properly educated and trained about the potential for Aboriginal communities and families to provide more appropriate solutions to family healing.
 - v. Requiring that all child-welfare decision makers consider the impact of the residential school.
3. We call upon all levels of government to fully implement Jordan's Principle.
5. We call upon the federal, provincial, territorial, and Aboriginal governments to develop culturally appropriate parenting programs for Aboriginal families.
7. We call upon the federal government to develop with Aboriginal groups a joint strategy to eliminate educational and employment gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians.
8. We call upon the federal government to eliminate the discrepancy in federal education funding for First Nations children being educated on reserves and those First Nations children being educated off reserves.
11. We call upon the federal government to provide adequate funding to end the backlog of First Nations students seeking a post-secondary education.
12. We call upon the federal, provincial, territorial, and Aboriginal governments to develop culturally appropriate early childhood education programs for Aboriginal families.
13. We call upon the federal government to acknowledge that Aboriginal rights include Aboriginal language rights.
14. We call upon the federal government to enact an Aboriginal Languages Act that incorporates the following principles:
 - i. Aboriginal languages are a fundamental and valued element of Canadian culture and society, and there is an urgency to preserve them.
 - ii. Aboriginal language rights are reinforced by the Treaties.
 - iii. The federal government has a responsibility to provide sufficient funds for Aboriginal-language revitalization and preservation.
 - iv. The preservation, revitalization, and strengthening of Aboriginal languages and cultures are best managed by Aboriginal people and communities.
 - v. Funding for Aboriginal language initiatives must reflect the diversity of Aboriginal languages.

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16. We call upon post-secondary institutions to create university and college degree and diploma programs in Aboriginal languages.
 17. We call upon all levels of government to enable residential school Survivors and their families to reclaim names changed by the residential school system by waiving administrative costs for a period of five years for the name-change process and the revision of official identity documents, such as birth certificates, passports, driver's licenses, health cards, status cards, and social insurance numbers.
 22. We call upon those who can effect change within the Canadian health-care system to recognize the value of Aboriginal healing practices and use them in the treatment of Aboriginal patients in collaboration with Aboriginal healers and Elders where requested by Aboriginal patients.
 23. We call upon all levels of government to:
 - i. Increase the number of Aboriginal professionals working in the health-care field.
 - ii. Ensure the retention of Aboriginal health-care providers in Aboriginal communities.
 - iii. Provide cultural competency training for all health-care professionals.
 31. We call upon the federal, provincial, and territorial governments to provide sufficient and stable funding to implement and evaluate community sanctions that will provide realistic alternatives to imprisonment for Aboriginal offenders and respond to the underlying causes of offending.
 40. We call on all levels of government, in collaboration with Aboriginal people, to create adequately funded and accessible Aboriginal-specific victim programs and services with appropriate evaluation mechanisms.
 43. 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.
 47. We call upon federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal governments to repudiate concepts used to justify European sovereignty over Indigenous peoples and lands, such as the Doctrine of Discovery and terra nullius, and to reform those laws, government policies, and litigation strategies that continue to rely on such concepts.
 53. We call upon the Parliament of Canada, in consultation and collaboration with Aboriginal peoples, to enact legislation to establish a National Council for Reconciliation. The legislation would establish the council as an independent, national, oversight body with membership jointly appointed by the Government of Canada and national Aboriginal organizations, and consisting of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal members. Its mandate would include, but not be limited to, the following:
 - i. Monitor, evaluate, and report annually to Parliament and the people of Canada on the Government of Canada's post-apology progress on reconciliation to ensure that government accountability for reconciling the relationship between Aboriginal peoples and the Crown is maintained in the coming years.
 - ii. Monitor, evaluate, and report to Parliament and the people of Canada on reconciliation progress across all levels and sectors of Canadian society, including the implementation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Calls to Action.
 - iii. Develop and implement a multi-year National Action Plan for Reconciliation, which includes research and policy development, public education programs, and resources.
 - iv. Promote public dialogue, public/private partnerships, and public initiatives for reconciliation.

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55. We call upon all levels of government to provide annual reports or any current data requested by the National Council for Reconciliation so that it can report on the progress towards reconciliation. The reports or data would include, but not be limited to:
- i. The number of Aboriginal children—including Métis and Inuit children—in care, compared with non-Aboriginal children, the reasons for apprehension, and the total spending on preventive and care services by child-welfare agencies.
 - ii. Comparative funding for the education of First Nations children on and off reserves.
 - iii. The educational and income attainments of Aboriginal peoples in Canada compared with non-Aboriginal people.
 - iv. Progress on closing the gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities in a number of health indicators such as: infant mortality, maternal health, suicide, mental health, addictions, life expectancy, birth rates, infant and child health issues, chronic diseases, illness and injury incidence, and the availability of appropriate health services.
 - v. Progress on eliminating the overrepresentation of Aboriginal children in youth custody over the next decade.
 - vi. Progress on reducing the rate of criminal victimization of Aboriginal people, including data related to homicide and family violence victimization and other crimes.
 - vii. Progress on reducing the overrepresentation of Aboriginal people in the justice and correctional systems.
57. We call upon federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal governments to provide education to public servants on the history of Aboriginal peoples, including the history and legacy of residential schools, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Treaties and Aboriginal rights, Indigenous law, and Aboriginal–Crown relations. This will require skills-based training in intercultural competency, conflict resolution, human rights, and anti-racism.
64. We call upon all levels of government that provide public funds to denominational schools to require such schools to provide an education on comparative religious studies, which must include a segment on Aboriginal spiritual beliefs and practices developed in collaboration with Aboriginal Elders.
66. We call upon the federal government to establish multiyear funding for community-based youth organizations to deliver programs on reconciliation and establish a national network to share information and best practices.
75. We call upon the federal government to work with provincial, territorial, and municipal governments, churches, Aboriginal communities, former residential school students, and current landowners to develop and implement strategies and procedures for the ongoing identification, documentation, maintenance, commemoration, and protection of residential school cemeteries or other sites at which residential school children were buried. This is to include the provision of appropriate memorial ceremonies and commemorative markers to honour the deceased children.
77. We call upon provincial, territorial, municipal, and community archives to work collaboratively with the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation to identify and collect copies of all records relevant to the history and legacy of the residential school system, and to provide these to the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation.

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79. We call upon the federal government, in collaboration with Survivors, Aboriginal organizations, and the arts community, to develop a reconciliation framework for Canadian heritage and commemoration. This would include, but not be limited to:
- i. Amending the Historic Sites and Monuments Act to include First Nations, Inuit, and Métis representation on the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada and its Secretariat.
 - ii. Revising the policies, criteria, and practices of the National Program of Historical Commemoration to integrate Indigenous history, heritage values, and memory practices into Canada's national heritage and history.
 - iii. Developing and implementing a national heritage plan and strategy for commemorating residential school sites, the history and legacy of residential schools, and the contributions of Aboriginal peoples to Canada's history.
82. We call upon provincial and territorial governments, in collaboration with Survivors and their organizations, and other parties to the Settlement Agreement, to commission and install a publicly accessible, highly visible, Residential Schools Monument in each capital city to honour Survivors and all the children who were lost to their families and communities.
87. We call upon all levels of government, in collaboration with Aboriginal peoples, sports halls of fame, and other relevant organizations, to provide public education that tells the national story of Aboriginal athletes in history.
88. We call upon all levels of government to take action to ensure long-term Aboriginal athlete development and growth, and continued support for the North American Indigenous Games, including funding to host the games and for provincial and territorial team preparation and travel.
91. We call upon the officials and host countries of international sporting events such as the Olympics, Pan Am, and Commonwealth games to ensure that Indigenous peoples' territorial protocols are respected, and local Indigenous communities are engaged in all aspects of planning and participating in such events
92. We call upon the corporate sector in Canada to adopt the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as a reconciliation framework and to apply its principles, norms, and standards to corporate policy and core operational activities involving Indigenous peoples and their lands and resources. This would include, but not be limited to, the following:
- i. Commit to meaningful consultation, building respectful relationships, and obtaining the free, prior, and informed consent of Indigenous peoples before proceeding with economic development projects.
 - ii. Ensure that Aboriginal peoples have equitable access to jobs, training, and education opportunities in the corporate sector, and that Aboriginal communities gain long-term sustainable benefits from economic development projects.
 - iii. Provide education for management and staff on the history of Aboriginal peoples, including the history and legacy of residential schools, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Treaties and Aboriginal rights, Indigenous law, and Aboriginal-Crown relations. This will require skills-based training in intercultural competency, conflict resolution, human rights, and anti-racism.

ANNUAL UPDATE

Following *A Collaborative Pathway Forward*, the Municipality remains committed to advancing truth and reconciliation through the 33 Calls to Action that have been adopted to date from the TRC's 94 Calls to Action. This section summarizes and highlights the progress made in 2024.

Calls to Action 13, 14, 16 and 17 (Language and Culture)

The Municipality maintains its commitment to helping Indigenous communities in the region strengthen their traditional languages. The Indigenous and Rural Relations Department continues to work with Facility Services and local traditional language leaders to honour Cree and Dene languages in municipal buildings.

Mayor Bowman joined Indigenous and Rural Relations staff in Fort Chipewyan for an event hosted by Mikisew Cree First Nation on March 27, 2024, in commemoration of National Indigenous Languages Day.

Call to Action 31 and 40 (Justice)

The Municipality continues addressing Missing or Murdered and Exploited Indigenous Peoples (MMEIP) through the MMEIP Taskforce. Active since February 2022, the taskforce responds to the epidemic of violence against Indigenous Peoples, which also advances the Calls to Justice identified within the final report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Women and Girls.

The Municipality partnered with the Athabasca Tribal Council (ATC) and the Nistawoyou Friendship Centre to commemorate the National Day of Awareness and Action for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two-Spirit People. The full-day commemorative event included a Pipe Ceremony, remarks from leaders and Elders, a solidarity walk, community feast, and memorial round dance.

The MMEIP Taskforce also commemorated Sisters in Spirit Day on Oct. 4 with ceremony and a candlelight vigil at the Raphael Cree Boat Launch in Waterways to honour the memories of the more than 55 missing or



murdered Indigenous Peoples in the Wood Buffalo region, and to support the loved ones and communities impacted by MMEIP in their grieving journeys.

Call to Action 47 (Doctrine of Discovery and terra nullius)

In 2024, the Municipality made great strides in the area of land ownership through the development of the Historical Indigenous Residential Land policy. This policy, adopted by Council on Oct. 8, addresses unresolved historical land ownership issues throughout rural and Indigenous communities in the region. The policy underscores the Municipality's commitment to true reconciliation by recognizing the lasting impacts of historical challenges related to Indigenous residential land ownership and title. To qualify for land transfer, residents must be of Indigenous descent, currently residing on the land with demonstrated historical ties to either land or structure and have no tax or utility accounts in arrears.

Further addressing Call to Action 47, and as identified as a priority in the 2023 Annual Update, the Municipality undertook a review of the Community Identification Committee policies, inclusive of the committee's naming inventory, Community Identification System Policy and Procedure, and the Community Identification Committee Bylaw. The independent review found the policies and procedures were not in alignment with the Municipality's commitment to truth and reconciliation. The committee also voiced concerns its work was going above and beyond the stated policy, citing examples of actively being inclusive of the Cree and Dene languages in names within the community. Examples included kiyām Community Park, the dry ponds and parks in the Parsons Creek neighbourhood, and the renaming of the bridge in Fort McKay. Several recommendations were made to bring the policies and procedures into better alignment

with truth and reconciliation, to provide procedural clarity and to further establish truth and reconciliation as the path forward for the Municipality.

In addition to these new initiatives, the Municipality continued its work with the Protocol Agreements, signing an agreement with one of the two remaining communities in 2024. The Protocol Agreements seek to strengthen relationships between the Municipality and the Indigenous communities in the region, providing a collaborative framework for decision-making, resource management, and jurisdictional arrangements, to encourage more meaningful participation and collaboration on joint priorities and municipal initiatives. To help achieve these outcomes, participating communities are eligible for funding via the Indigenous Community Capacity Program.

Call to Action 57 (Professional Development and Training for Public Servants)

In September 2024, Rural Operations was transitioned from Public Works to Indigenous and Rural Relations (IRR) to ensure services better align with the high-quality standards in Fort McMurray while supporting truth and reconciliation. This organizational change supports Call to Action 57, as it enhances the cultural competency of rural operations staff and helps ensure municipal services reflect and respect Indigenous values.

Professional development and training for municipal staff continues to be a top priority and area of visible achievement for the organization. The Municipality continues to pursue training opportunities for staff to participate in, to continue their learning and journeys of reconciliation. New educational opportunities for municipal staff in 2024 included Treaty Teachings by Holly Fortier, which saw approximately 70 staff participants. Many staff were also invited to participate

in cultural teachings provided by Traditional Knowledge Keepers Leonard and Amanda Cardinal of Thunderbird Inc.

The TRC Challenge returned to the Municipality in September 2024 for its fourth iteration. The Reconciliation Champions were central to the success of the initiative. The Champions participated in reviewing the challenge material and were responsible for circulating information to their respective departments, including both office and field staff. Learning materials for field staff were tailored to fit within toolbox talks to make the challenge accessible to more staff. Despite the materials being provided for toolbox talks, some aspects of the challenge were still not undertaken by field workers. For example, the challenge had a goal of receiving 400 submissions to its weekly questions through the campaign, including 100 from field workers. According to the evaluation material, only 199 submissions were received and none from field staff. Administration recommends for future success of the Truth and Reconciliation Challenge that it be required as mandatory training for all employees, to ensure the organizational buy-in to create time and space for employees across the organization to meaningfully participate.

This year, IRR shared and extended challenge materials to Fort McMurray Wood Buffalo Economic Development and Tourism (FMWBEDT), the Fort McMurray Airport, and Wood Buffalo Housing, to boost participation and awareness across external partners.

Call to Action 69 (Museums and Archives)

In 2024, the Municipality adopted Call to Action 69 with the emphasis of encouraging libraries to commit more resources to public education and programming focused on residential schools. This move formalizes the work already being done in partnership with the Wood Buffalo Regional Library, such as

It's Time to Read, which features the work and voices of Indigenous writers to increase understanding and awareness of Indigenous culture, history and contemporary issues.

In June, It's Time to Read featured Richard Van Camp, a **Tłı̨ch̓** Dene author and filmmaker from Fort Smith, Northwest Territories. Programming was created to reach diverse audiences, from babies and toddlers to adults, as well as readers and nonreaders alike. It's Time to Read featured Van Camp's graphic novel *Three Feathers*, as well as the film of the same name, for a book and film review and speaker panel. *Three Feathers* focuses on the power of community, culture, and redemption as three young men return from being sentenced to nine months on the land as part of a restorative justice program in the Northwest Territories of Canada. Van Camp's board book, *Little You*, was also featured in June at a Mom and Tot Gathering hosted at the library.

Calls to Action 79 and 82 (Commemoration)

Commemoration continues to be one of the top priorities for the Municipality in its journey towards reconciliation, realizing the significant and widespread impact residential schools has had on Indigenous Peoples and communities across Canada and right here in Wood Buffalo. Holy Angels Residential School operated in Fort Chipewyan from 1874 to 1974, then the Bishop Piche Indian Day School. Indigenous and Rural Relations (IRR) Director Dennis Fraser has been attending gatherings held to advance both the broader understanding of the tragic injustices inflicted by the residential school system, as well as the local impacts and what's needed to provide healing in the region. For example, he attended the Healing Fort Chip gathering in April 2024. In addition, he attended the initial canine-assisted search of the old residential school grounds for historic human remains in September 2024.



Youth athletes and community builders take the stage after being honoured at the 2024 Indigenous Sports Gallery ceremony

With support from Council, IRR will be engaging with the community of Fort Chipewyan, including the three nations, on the design and placement of a monument honouring residential school survivors and the children who did not return home. This is a direct response to Call to Action 82. A public monument will recognize the pain and loss experienced by Indigenous families and communities, and provide a space for reflection, healing, and reconciliation. It will also ensure future generations learn about this history.

Calls to Action 87 and 88 (Sports and Reconciliation)

The Municipality is continuing the legacy of the Indigenous Sport Gallery, first created by the Wood Buffalo 2023 Arctic Winter Games. The gallery intends to inspire youth and celebrate the stories of local Indigenous athletes and their ongoing contributions to sport in the region. Nominees were members of local First Nation or Métis communities in Wood Buffalo, and were nominated in the categories of Youth Athletes, Community Builders, or Local Legends. Through traditional Indigenous governance practices, a selection committee made up of community representatives, Administration, and an Elder, nominees were selected by consensus of a sharing circle. The selected nominees were formally inducted during a ceremony held in November 2024.

The Indigenous Sport Gallery will be touring the region in 2025 to continue both the legacy of the game and the Municipality's commitment to Call to Action 87.

Call to Action 92 (Business and Reconciliation)

The organizational change that transitioned Rural Operations from Public Works to Indigenous and Rural Relations (IRR) in September 2024 also supports Call to Action 92, particularly in an effort to create equitable access to jobs, training, and education opportunities for Indigenous Peoples. By transitioning Rural Operations to IRR, the Municipality is tailoring its recruitment and employee engagement efforts in rural and Indigenous areas of Wood Buffalo, to be more inclusive and help remove barriers to employment.

On Nov. 28, 2024, the Municipality hosted the second Fort McMurray Wood Buffalo Economic Information Partnership (FIEP), in partnership with Prairies Canada and the Government of Alberta's Regional Economic Development Services. More than 20 participants from government, stakeholders, Indigenous and regional partners shared information and learned about funding opportunities available to the region.

PROTOCOL AGREEMENT REVIEW

History

One of the four key strategic priorities in the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo's 2018-2021 Strategic Plan was "Rural and Indigenous communities and partnerships", with one pillar calling for the development of an Indigenous consultation policy.

In support of this initiative, a consultant was hired in May 2019 to undertake engagements and complete a draft of a Municipal Indigenous Consultation Policy (MICP). Between October and November 2019, the consultant engaged with the eight First Nations and six Métis communities. Several core themes emerged throughout those engagements, largely centralizing around relationships between Indigenous communities and the RMWB, and particularly related to capacity.

Subsequent engagements in 2020 were held to determine whether or not to transition to a relationship-focused protocol agreement or the MICP. All of the Indigenous communities that participated in those engagements supported transitioning to a protocol agreement. In May 2021, a draft version of the Protocol Agreement was circulated to all Indigenous communities in Wood Buffalo, proposing an agreement for collaboration and renewed relationships between the RMWB and each Indigenous community.

While the Protocol Agreements were intended to be unique to each community, common components were to be included:

- Joint identification of areas of mutual interest for joint collaboration;

- Establishment of a joint committee between the RMWB Administration and the Administration of the Indigenous communities;
- Establishment of a government-to-government leadership forum made up of elected leadership between the Municipality and the Indigenous community;
- Establishment of an engagement protocol for all municipal projects, initiatives, policies, and decisions that may impact the Indigenous community or that the Indigenous community may have an interest in; and
- Commitment to collaboratively explore how the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) could be used as the framework for reconciliation in Wood Buffalo.

On Jan. 25, 2022, Indigenous and Rural Relations (IRR) presented the "Indigenous Community Capacity Funding Policy" (ICCP). The ICCP was approved and became an important component of the Protocol Agreements, as it addresses the issue of capacity that was heard repeatedly during engagement. The policy provides eligible Indigenous communities who have finalized and executed the Protocol Agreement with financial support to implement the protocol agreement, and for participation in engagement on municipal projects, programs, policies, and initiatives. The funding is intended to cover wages of an employee dedicated to the Protocol Agreement, as well as funding to support engagement.

Outcomes

The Protocol Agreements and ICCP funding are intended to foster and formalize relationships, as well as increase capacity within participating Indigenous communities.

Most communities signed on in 2023 following a period of negotiations. As of the first quarter of 2025, 11 of the 12 Indigenous communities in Wood Buffalo have signed and actively participate with IRR.

While relationships are difficult to track, there is both qualitative and quantitative data supporting the immense value of the Protocol Agreements and the ICCP grant. Through data collected from the annual mandatory reporting for the ICCP grant, several themes emerged illustrating this point:

- Capacity Building and Strengthening Governance – Several of the nations used the ICCP funding to hire personnel critical to managing government relations, consultation, and engagement, as well as coordinate activities related to the Protocol Agreement. This allowed nations to strengthen internal governance and improve collaboration with the Municipality. Some nations were especially successful in leveraging the capacity funding to access additional funding opportunities. Securing additional funding has allowed for enhanced community initiatives, including housing, education, technology infrastructure, culture, Elder support, and more.

1. “With the ICCP funding, the FMMN was able to hire a staff member to implement the Protocol Agreement at a community level in a meaningful way. We hired a Public Relations Coordinator who is able to communicate with our community members on the good work the RMWB is doing and also helps us collect community information.” – Fort McKay Métis Nation

2. “This funding has been an integral part in kickstarting the community’s capacity. We continue to see the fruits of this investment. This ongoing success is a testament to the effectiveness of our team and the value of the municipal programs that have supported us. This support has had a transformative impact on our community, enabling us to enhance our capacity and expand our services in ways that may not have been possible otherwise.” – Chard Métis Nation

- Strengthening Government-to-Government Relations – Nations credit the Protocol Agreement with furthering the government-to-government relationship with the Municipality. Frequent meetings are part of the Protocol Agreement policy. Based on each nation’s unique needs and capacity, meeting schedules were adopted and workplans were collaboratively developed to identify priority projects. It also opened and streamlined communications. It has been reported that, as a result of the Protocol Agreements, Municipal response has improved.

1. “It allowed us to build the framework for a working relationship between the Municipality and our nation. This partnership with the RMWB allows us an avenue to work together in tackling some of these issues.” – Chipewyan Prairie First Nation
2. “Improved relations have also enabled us to make significant progress toward upgrading solid waste management on reserve in partnership with RMWB, to speedily resolve a taxation issue, and to make progress on various transportation issues. The working relationship between RMWB and FMMN is vastly improved.” – Fort McKay First Nation

3. "The program facilitated a strong working relationship between the Nation and the RMWB." – Fort McMurray 468 First Nation
- Indigenous Participation in Municipal Planning and Development – Capacity funding improved active participation in municipal projects. Part of the ICCP funding is intended to fund engagement efforts, which has allowed for more fulsome engagement. More community members, including Elders and Traditional Knowledge Keepers, have been able to participate in municipal projects, giving the nations more hands-on involvement in overall decision-making.
1. "It allowed us to increase capacity particularly in relations with the municipal government. Communications between the RMWB and Willow Lake Métis Nation have become regular and effective, as well as citizenship's awareness and participation in community programs." – Willow Lake Métis Nation
 2. "Overall, the Program is instrumental in ensuring Indigenous communities are not only consulted but are also active participants in shaping municipal policies and projects impacting their traditional territories and community development." – Chard Métis Nation
 3. "We were able to provide opportunities for members to participate in events and also help preserve community knowledge." – Fort Chipewyan Métis Nation

The implementation of the Protocol Agreements has also significantly increased engagement between several of the Municipality's departments, in addition to Indigenous and Rural Relations (IRR), and the nations, fostering stronger relationships and improving service delivery to Indigenous

communities. Developed collaboratively with IRR and the respective nations, these agreements have established clear priorities and addressed challenges related to municipal services and jurisdiction. This framework has ensured a more coordinated and responsive approach to community needs, resulting in increased trust and improved relationships.

A key success of this framework has been improved coordination between municipal departments and Indigenous communities. For example, Planning and Development has designated a dedicated point of contact for communities such as Fort Chipewyan, ensuring increased support for the nations and community members in navigating administrative challenges within the system, such as applying for development permits.

Likewise, collaboration between IRR and Emergency Management has increased visibility and preparedness in the community. The Protocol Agreements have created dedicated platforms for priorities such as emergency response planning, including public education initiatives, mock drills, and the integration of key measures into the community emergency management plan.

While improving municipal coordination has been a key focus, the Protocol Agreements have also led to broader support for rural and Indigenous communities through external partnerships. One notable outcome has been the increased visibility of non-municipal agencies and organizations. This alignment ensures that recreational programming and support services reflect community priorities. Additionally, IRR has facilitated partnerships to address common challenges such as travel, increased access to municipal facilities, and increased agency participation in Municipal-led initiatives.

This structured approach benefits the Municipality by reinforcing its commitment to meaningful engagement and informed decision-making. It also addresses capacity

challenges faced by some nations, ensuring they can actively participate in key discussions and initiatives that shape their communities.

As these relationships continue to evolve, the Municipality remains committed to strengthening partnerships, addressing systemic barriers, and advancing reconciliation in meaningful ways. By prioritizing collaboration and trust, these efforts lay the groundwork for sustainable, community-driven solutions and overall advancement of true reconciliation.

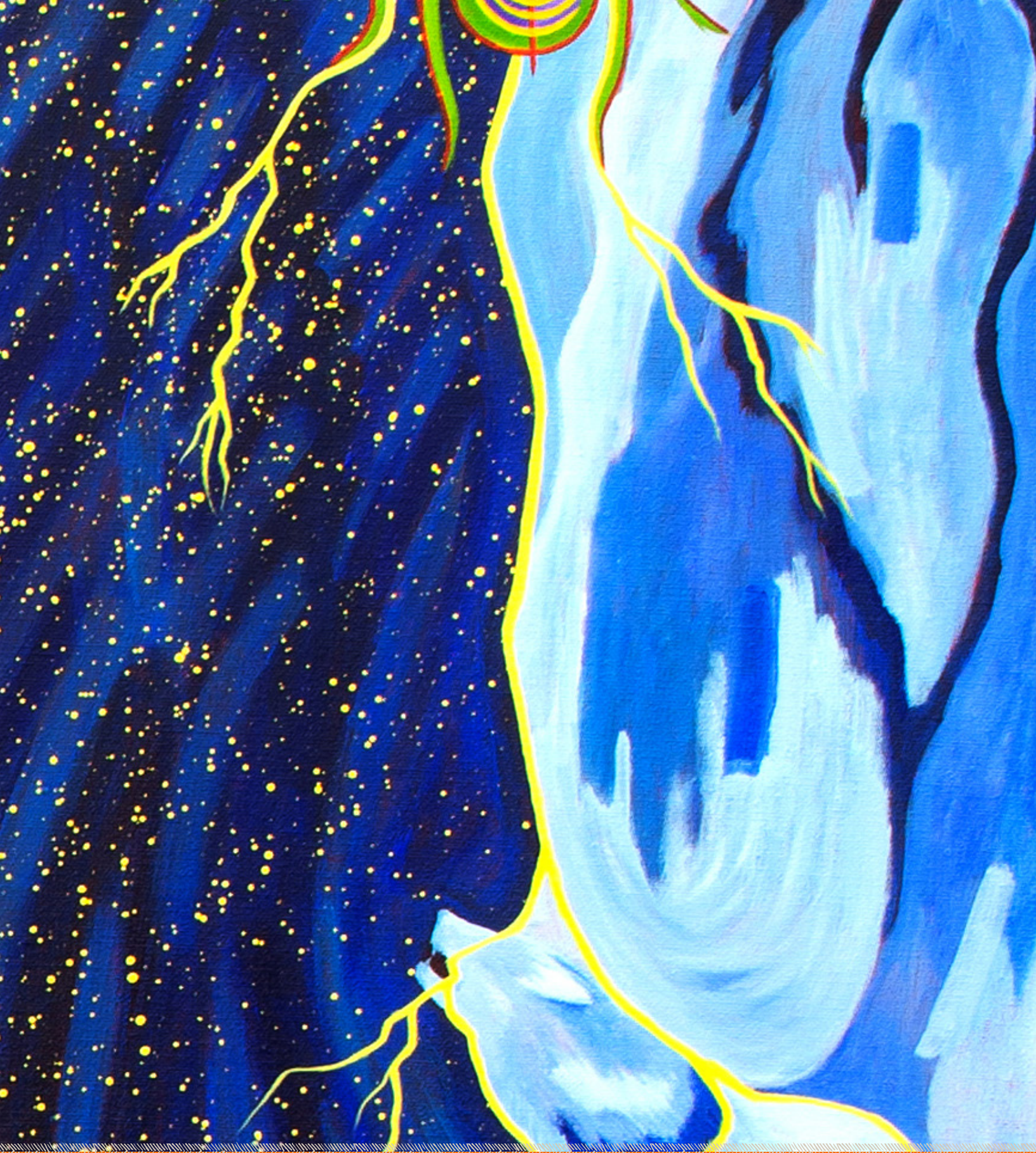
The Pathway Forward: 2025

The Municipality has truth and reconciliation at the forefront of 2025 and beyond. This year marks the third update to *A Collaborative Pathway Forward: Responding to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action*. Following the 2025 Annual Update, which will be published next year, the Municipality will develop a new report to guide the municipal response to truth and reconciliation. A lot has changed across the organization, the region, and the country since the inaugural report. A new report is needed that takes this into consideration, as well as new strategic plans and priorities.

The late Justice Murray Sinclair, chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, identified that reconciliation was a marathon of which we cannot yet see the finish line or the challenges that will come up along the way. The Municipality believes in the race and remains committed to it. It is now time to take action and address the hurdles and obstacles we've encountered over the past four years, so we can stay on course and keep moving in the right direction.

Therefore, Administration is not recommending any additional Calls to Action at this time. Rather, Administration recommends the Municipality take inventory of all challenges and opportunities identified in previous reports. A long list of ideas have been brought forward, and many are awaiting time and attention. Initiatives such as comprehensive and systemic reviews of existing policies, plans, and procedures take time and dedication, but will ultimately bring the Municipality into true alignment with its vision for truth and reconciliation. It is also an opportunity to explore ways to deepen current commitments to the Calls to Action, whether through municipal implementation or advocating to other levels of government.

Many of the initiatives over the past few years have been successful and resulted in meaningful change. By staying committed to those initiatives – and following up on previously identified challenges and opportunities – the Municipality will continue to be a leader in truth and reconciliation.



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