

**Directed to:** Mayor Joe Preston and Members of City Council

**Meeting Date:**  
April 7, 2025

**Department:** City Manager's Office

**Attachment**

**Prepared By:** Lisa Higgs, City Manager

**Subject:** Indigenous First Nations Gathering Place

**Recommendation:**

THAT: Report CMO-02-25 relating to Indigenous First Nations Gathering Place be received for information; and further,

THAT: Staff be directed to consult with local First Nations and Indigenous representatives to explore collaborating on an Indigenous First Nations Gathering Place within the City of St. Thomas.

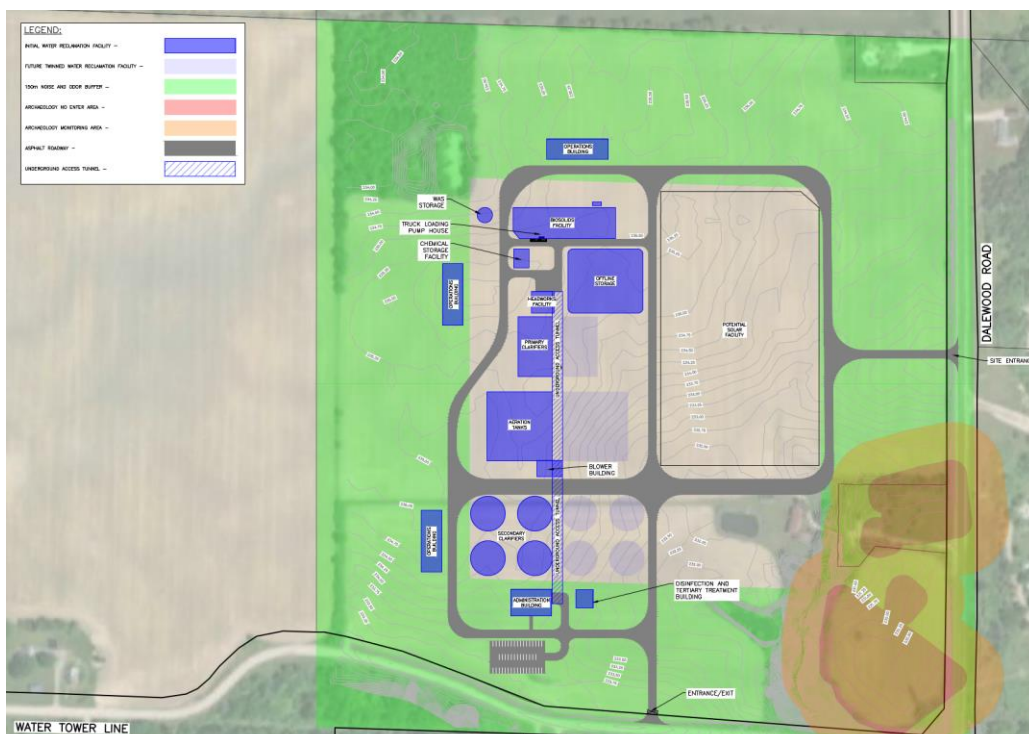
**Background:**

As part of the land acquisition for the City's new Water Reclamation Facility (pollution control plant), archaeological investigations have been completed on the site, with a location in the Southeast corner generating sufficient findings to advance the investigation to further stages of study.

Citing the Truth and Reconciliation's Calls to Action, a member of council requested that staff explore potentially utilizing the archaeological site adjacent to the WRF as a possible Indigenous First Nations Gathering Place. Indigenous First Nations Gathering places are spaces designed for cultural expression, community building, and reconciliation efforts, often incorporating elements inspired by Indigenous traditions and philosophies.

Among the Truth and Reconciliation's calls to action include: a recommendation to develop and implement plans and strategies for commemorating contributions of Aboriginal peoples to Canada's history (#79); a call to artists and to community to collaborate and create projects that contribute to the reconciliation process (#83); and a requirement for municipalities to use the the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) as a framework for implementation (#43). Article 11 of UNDRIP enshrines the rights of Indigenous Peoples to practicing and revitalizing cultural traditions and customs, while the National Action Plan on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls calls for gathering places to safely share truth and commemorate those missing.

As a reminder, the WRF draft site plan is shown below for 50MLD size in dark blue. The ghosted light blue colour are the features required to expand to 100MLD. The area to the right of the 100MLD inside the gray roads will include a large holding pond and a potential solar generation array. Outside the gray roads would be topsoil berms and security fence. A further twinning of the plant (to 200 MLD) is possible east of the grey north-south road. The southeast corner (in orange) is the area that remains uncleared based on archaeological findings.



Given that the archaeological area adjacent to the new WRF is underneath existing hydroelectric power lines, is located very close to sewage treatment facilities and (its future expansions), and outside the City's municipal boundary, it is not recommended as a site for an Indigenous First Nations Gathering Place.

While there have been previous, informal appeals by First Nations groups for the City to create a space, it is critical that any space is considered, at the outset, with comprehensive Indigenous consultation in the planning, design, siting, and construction process. It is critical that the gathering place is unique, appropriate, and an intentional space created collaboratively. There may also be opportunities to work with existing community partners to expand on this collaboration, as part of a future housing initiative.

It is important that any consultation is supported by sufficient funding; an unfunded offer to create a gathering space may feel like an empty promise and could negatively impact reconciliation efforts. The 2025 budget does not contain allocated funds for a space, so initial communication with First Nations and Indigenous representatives will have to clearly articulate the budgetary constraints, with an indication that execution of the project is subject to funds being allocated in the future. If Council does not anticipate funding a space in the future, collaboration should not be initiated.

**Strategic Priority:**

Strategic Pillar: Excellence in All We Do - Priority #4: Equitable, Accessible, and Inclusive Communities

Strategic Pillar: Prepared and Resilient City - Priority #5: Reciprocal Partnerships

**Financial Impact:**

There are no financial impacts in initiating discussions, but there are costs associated with the capital construction of a gathering place and possible ongoing operating costs.

Respectfully,

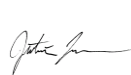


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Reviewed By:



Social  
Services

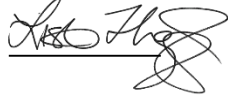


Industrial  
Development



PRF

Approved By:



City Manager