

SUBJECT: Status update on Indigenous advisory services work

TO: Committee of the Whole

FROM: Corporate Affairs  
Communications and Engagement

Report Number: CAF-02-26

Wards Affected: not applicable

Date to Committee: May 11, 2026

Date to Council: May 26, 2026

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## **Recommendation:**

Receive for information corporate affairs report CAF-02-26 providing an update on work undertaken to date related to Indigenous relationships and engagement.

## **Executive Summary**

The purpose of this report is to respond to direction provided by Council at the November 13, 2025, Budget Committee meeting to explore approaches related to Indigenous relationships and engagement. It also provides an overview of work undertaken to date and reflects the City's current stage in this work. The findings highlight the importance of continued learning, listening, and relationship-building as foundational elements moving forward.

Staff have undertaken a municipal scan involving over 20 municipalities, alongside local discussions and internal review, to better understand how municipalities approach this work. This work has been informed by ongoing collaboration with the Indigenous Advisory Circle, whose contributions have provided important guidance and perspective. The work has also been informed by the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) Indigenous-Municipal Relationship Agreements Guidance Document, which provides a useful municipal reference point for understanding how Indigenous-municipal relationships may be approached in a manner grounded in relationship-building, dialogue, and local context.

## **Purpose of report:**

The purpose of the report is to give Council a status update on work completed so far related to Indigenous relationships and engagement, and to respond to Council's November 13, 2025

direction to explore possible approaches in this area. It is not asking Council to approve a final model or structure yet. Instead, it is meant to:

- show what staff have done so far
- share what was learned through the municipal scan, local discussions, and internal review
- explain that Burlington is still in an early stage of this work
- reinforce that the current focus is on learning, listening, and relationship-building before

**Key findings:**

The work identified several consistent themes:

- There is no single approach; practices vary based on local context
- Relationship-building is ongoing and shaped through dialogue over time
- Learning and listening are commonly identified as early areas of focus
- Organizational approaches tend to evolve as understanding deepens
- AMO guidance reinforces that municipal approaches are most effective when they are relationship-based, context-specific, and developed over time

**Implications:**

**Financial**

There may be financial implications associated with ongoing learning and engagement activities.

**Human Resources**

This work requires coordination across departments. No additional staff resources are proposed at this time.

**Legal**

No immediate legal implications have been identified.

**Communications and Engagement**

Engagement will continue to be informed by ongoing dialogue and collaboration.

**Climate**

No direct climate implications have been identified.

## Background

The City's work related to Truth and Reconciliation began in 2018 with the development of Burlington's Land Acknowledgement, created in collaboration with the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation, an Indigenous community member, and City staff.

In 2022, this work expanded through the establishment of the Indigenous Advisory Circle, launched and supported by the Mayor's Office. Since its establishment, the Indigenous Advisory Circle has made meaningful contributions to the City's work. Through 2025 and early 2026, members contributed approximately 100–110 hours in meeting preparation, research, event support, and advisory input, with a significant portion of this time provided on an unpaid basis.

Their involvement has supported several City initiatives, including Sweetgrass Park, Horizon 2050, and the development of this report. These contributions reflect an ongoing commitment to sharing knowledge and supporting the City's understanding of Indigenous perspectives. Federal direction, including Canada's adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (2021) and the 2023–2028 Action Plan, provides additional context for municipalities as they consider how to strengthen relationships with Indigenous communities. These commitments, along with Burlington's existing initiatives, form the backdrop for considering the City's next steps in this area.

Additional municipal context is also provided through the AMO Indigenous-Municipal Relationship Agreements Guidance Document, which emphasizes that Indigenous-municipal relationships are best approached through sustained dialogue, mutual understanding, and respect for the distinct histories, rights, and roles that shape those relationships. The document also recognizes that formal agreements or structures are typically most effective when they emerge from established relationships rather than preceding them.

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## Status

### Analysis

To inform this work, staff undertook a municipal scan of over 20 municipalities across Canada, reflecting a range of sizes, geographies, and governance models.

Conversations were guided by common questions related to:

- approaches to relationship-building and engagement
- organizational structure and staffing

- financial resourcing
- formal agreements and partnerships

This work was complemented by local discussions and internal review, as well as consideration of municipal guidance materials, including AMO's Indigenous-Municipal Relationship Agreements Guidance Document.

## **Methodology**

Staff developed a structured approach to identifying municipalities and regional governments with relevant Indigenous engagement practices. The following criteria were used:

1. **Geographic and demographic diversity**  
Municipalities of various sizes and locations were included—large urban centres, mid-sized communities, rural municipalities, and northern jurisdictions. This range helped ensure the scan reflected different governance models, service delivery structures, and community contexts.
2. **Presence of emerging or established approaches**  
Municipalities were selected if they had developed, or were developing, approaches to Indigenous relationships and engagement. These comparators provided insight into how approaches evolve over time.
3. **Alignment with provincial and national trends**  
Ontario municipalities were prioritized to understand regional approaches, with several out-of-province comparators included to observe emerging practices nationally.
4. **Lessons learned and emerging practices**  
Municipalities with more established approaches were included to help identify considerations related to funding, long-term relationship-building, and integrating Indigenous perspectives into municipal work.
5. **Relevance to municipal decision-making**  
Municipalities were selected to reflect a range of organizational approaches, including advisory tables, distributed responsibilities, and hybrid models.
6. **Referrals from participating municipalities**  
Additional municipalities were identified through referrals, providing further insight into training, engagement approaches, and organizational readiness.

This methodology was intended to provide staff with a broad understanding of how municipalities are approaching this work, while also considering guidance such as the AMO document, which reinforces that relationship-building is foundational and that local context is central.

## **Engagement Process**

Four standard questions guided each conversation:

- How would you describe your approach to Indigenous relationship-building and engagement?
- How is this work supported within your organization?
- What types of financial investments support this work?
- Are there any formal agreements or partnerships in place?

Most municipalities participated through 60-minute virtual discussions. Notes were documented and summarized to identify common themes.

### Municipal Participants

The municipalities included were:

Brant County	Halton Region	Region of Peel
Brampton	Hamilton	Richmond Hill
Brantford	Kawartha Lakes	Sault Ste. Marie
Bruce County	Kitchener	Sioux Lookout
Calgary	London	St. John's
Cambridge	Milton	Thunder Bay
Edmonton	Mississauga	Toronto
Fredericton	Niagara Region	Vancouver
Guelph	North Bay	Vaughan
Halifax	Oakville	Waterloo
Halton Hills	Ottawa	Waterloo Region
		Winnipeg

Highlighted jurisdictions indicate those that responded.

### Findings and Interpretation

- 1. Approaches vary across municipalities:** The scan did not identify a single approach that would be suitable across all communities. Municipal approaches are shaped by local histories, relationships, governance structures, and the presence of Indigenous-led institutions.

The AMO Indigenous-Municipal Relationship Agreements Guidance Document was referenced as a helpful municipal resource in considering this work. Its guidance reinforces that Indigenous-municipal relationships should be grounded in respect, recognition, reciprocity, and dialogue, and that any formal agreements are most meaningful when they are built on relationships that have already been established.

The AMO guidance also underscores that municipalities should avoid assuming a single template can be applied across communities, and instead take into account local histories, Indigenous rights, and the distinct relationship context in each municipality. This aligns closely with what was heard through the municipal scan.

- 2. Indigenous-led organizations influence local approaches:** Many municipalities work closely with Indigenous-led organizations, such as Friendship Centres or community service agencies, which help inform local approaches.

Burlington and Halton Region do not have comparable institutions, which may influence how this work develops locally. In this context, ongoing dialogue with local Indigenous partners, including the Indigenous Advisory Circle, remains an important source of insight.

This also reflects the AMO guidance, which points to the importance of relationship-specific approaches rather than assuming that one governance or partnership structure will fit all municipalities.

- 3. Internal approaches and capacity vary:** Municipalities organize this work differently based on their context, relationships, and capacity.

In Burlington, engagement with Indigenous partners is currently taking place across multiple service areas. These efforts are ongoing and reflect growing awareness across the organization.

The AMO guidance does not prescribe a particular staffing or governance model. Rather, it suggests that municipalities should first build understanding of the relationships, responsibilities, and local context that may shape how the work is organized over time.

- 4. Relationship-building is ongoing:** Municipalities consistently described this work as evolving over time. The concept of “progress at the speed of trust” was reflected across conversations and highlights the importance of continuity and relationship-building.

This perspective is consistent with the AMO guidance, which emphasizes that strong Indigenous-municipal relationships are built through ongoing engagement, trust, and sustained effort, rather than through rapid structural decisions alone.

- 5. Learning and listening are foundational:** Many municipalities identified learning and listening as early and ongoing areas of focus. These steps support internal understanding and help ensure that future approaches are informed by Indigenous perspectives.

This is also consistent with the direction reflected in the AMO guidance, which highlights the importance of listening, learning, and relationship development as foundational to any future agreements, structures, or shared approaches.

The work completed to date reflects a stage focused on building understanding and strengthening relationships.

**Key themes include:**

- the importance of continued learning and awareness
- the value of ongoing dialogue
- the need to better understand local perspectives
- the recognition that approaches will continue to evolve over time
- the importance of grounding municipal approaches in established guidance, including the AMO Indigenous-Municipal Relationship Agreements Guidance Document

Taken together, these findings indicate that Burlington is in an early stage of this work.

At this stage, the focus remains on:

- building internal understanding and organizational readiness
- continuing to strengthen existing relationships
- creating space to listen to and learn from Indigenous partners
- allowing approaches to develop over time, rather than establishing formal structures prematurely

Overall, the work is best understood as relationship-based, context-specific, and evolving. The emphasis at this stage is on continuing to build the understanding and relationships that will inform future direction.

This work remains ongoing and continues to be shaped through collaboration, reflection, and experience.

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**Key Dates & Milestones**

**2021**

- Canada adopts the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (UNDRIP)*, providing national context for advancing Indigenous rights and relationships

**2022**

- Establishment of the Indigenous Advisory Circle to provide guidance on advancing municipal Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action

**2023**

- Release of the federal UNDRIP Action Plan

**2025–2026 (to date)**

- Municipal scan and internal review completed
- Ongoing collaboration with the Indigenous Advisory Circle

- Review of municipal guidance materials, including the AMO Indigenous-Municipal Relationship Agreements Guidance Document

### **2026–2027 (anticipated)**

- Continued learning, dialogue, and information-gathering
- Ongoing internal reflection and coordination
- Report back to Council in Q3 2027 with further findings and options for future consideration

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## **Implications**

### **Financial**

There may be financial implications associated with ongoing learning and engagement activities.

### **Human Resources**

This work requires coordination across departments. No additional staff resources are proposed at this time.

### **Legal**

No immediate legal implications have been identified.

### **Communications and Engagement**

Engagement will continue to be informed by ongoing dialogue and collaboration.

### **Climate**

No direct climate implications have been identified.

## **Conclusion**

This report provides an overview of work undertaken to date and key observations from both municipal comparators and local discussions.

The findings, together with the AMO Indigenous-Municipal Relationship Agreements Guidance Document, reinforce that this work is ongoing and continues to evolve through learning, listening, and relationship-building.

Staff will return to Council by Q3 2027 with findings and options for future consideration.

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## **References**

A summary of relevant reports, decisions, and other related material, include hyperlinks

### **Strategic Alignment**

- Designing and delivering complete communities
  - Providing the best services and experiences
  - Protecting and improving the natural environment and taking action on climate change
  - Driving organizational performance
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### **Report Approval:**

All reports are reviewed and approved by the Commissioner, Head of Corporate Affairs, Chief Financial Officer, and Commissioner of Legal and Legislative Services/City Solicitor.