

DECLARATION

Strengthening Relationships Between the City of Edmonton and Urban Aboriginal People

It is said that the strength of a building is determined by the quality of its foundation. The following belief statements are offered as foundation for the building of stronger relationships between the City of Edmonton and Aboriginal people who make Edmonton their home. It is hoped that these statements will serve as first steps in building fuller appreciation and respect for the contributions of First Nations, Metis, Inuit and Non-Status Aboriginal Peoples and in building an appropriately comprehensive Aboriginal agenda for the City of Edmonton.

CELEBRATING PAST ABORIGINAL CONTRIBUTIONS

We acknowledge the significant contributions of Aboriginal Peoples to our city's past. Much of the establishment of Edmonton and region can be attributed to Aboriginal Peoples who settled the region thousands of years prior to the arrival of European settlers. The place now known as Edmonton was part of an important Aboriginal trade route and served as a pehonan – a waiting place – for Aboriginal Peoples. European settlers to the Edmonton region were sustained through the support they received from Aboriginal people who generously shared their knowledge and wisdom and intimate relationship with the land and nature. These contributions by Aboriginal Peoples helped begin the development of Edmonton into a thriving urban centre.

RECOGNIZING THAT PAST INJUSTICES HAVE IMPACTED ABORIGINAL SOCIETY

We understand that Aboriginal Peoples have lived through many injustices that have had devastating effects on their communities and their ways of life. Paternalism, colonialism and bureaucracy have had far-reaching negative consequences on the ability of the Aboriginal communities to sustain their traditional ways of life and assure their futures. The legacy of initial western contact with Aboriginal communities has resulted in the perpetuation of numerous injustices for many people in today's Aboriginal communities.

ACKNOWLEDGING THE UNIQUE CHALLENGES FACING ABORIGINAL PEOPLE

We understand that as a group, Aboriginal people do not experience the same level of well-being and quality of life as many other groups in our region. Aboriginal people experience significant disparity in the areas of education, health and justice and face inordinate levels of poverty, under-employment and other social problems including racism. These struggles have exacted painful outcomes for Aboriginal Peoples. The imbalances call for the active involvement of Aboriginal people in identifying the issues and priorities and in developing partnerships and well-supported plans of action to achieve needed change.

VALUING ABORIGINAL CONTRIBUTIONS TODAY

We are fortunate to share in the diverse cultural, social and economic contributions Aboriginal Peoples bring to our city each day. The Aboriginal communities of today are re-claiming and nurturing their cultural identities and striving to achieve prosperity. Their success can be supported through broad recognition that: Aboriginal Peoples possess rich and distinct cultural identities, values and knowledge often based on close relationships with the land and the Creator; Aboriginal people are increasingly involved in the mainstream of economic development in Edmonton and make significant economic contributions in terms of taxes and dollars reinvested in the community; Aboriginal contributions to our city through the sharing of distinct cultural values and knowledge and through economic investment make for an enhanced quality of life for all people in our region.

APPRECIATING THE LEGITIMACY OF ABORIGINAL AUTONOMY

We recognize that Aboriginal Peoples have not surrendered their rights to autonomy. Aboriginal Peoples were autonomous at the time of contact and yet have endured regulation for generations. In Canada, the Constitution Act of 1982 recognized and affirmed existing Aboriginal and treaty rights. The Government of Canada in a 1995 federal policy statement recognized the inherent right of self-government as an existing Aboriginal right under section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982. We recognize that for many Aboriginal people, self-governance is rightfully viewed as a first step in community capacity building and resolution of many of the issues experienced by their communities. We value harmony in our relationship and value the willingness of Aboriginal people to work in partnership with the rest of the community to enhance the development and prosperity of Edmonton.

ABORIGINAL PEOPLE IN OUR CITY'S FUTURE

Aboriginal people must have a strong voice in our city's future. Edmonton has one of the largest and fastest growing Aboriginal populations of any urban centre in Canada. The City of Edmonton will seek the wisdom and guidance of Aboriginal people on matters that affect them most. Aboriginal youth represent vitality and opportunity and must be actively involved in shaping the future of this city. The City will seek to build relationships with Aboriginal Peoples that are rooted in trust and respect. All of our partnerships must involve shared responsibility and ensure that Aboriginal Peoples take their rightful place in building a strong Aboriginal presence and voice in the cultural, social and economic future of Edmonton.

Declared by Edmonton City Council on August 30th, 2005