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Report 2025-116

Report Title: Strengthening Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation

Committee Name: Corporate Support

Committee Meeting Date: June 3, 2025

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Council Meeting Date: June 18, 2025

Strategic Plan Priorities: ☐ Innovate for Service Excellence
☐ Ignite Economic Opportunity
☒ Foster a Thriving Community
☐ Propel Sustainable Growth
☐ Champion a Vibrant Future

Information Report

“That the Corporate Support Committee receive Report 2025-116 ‘Strengthening Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation’ for information; and

Further That the Committee recommend that County Council receive this report for information.”

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to update the Corporate Support Committee and Council on recent Indigenous cultural awareness training delivered to County staff and to provide an overview of ongoing engagement activities with Williams Treaties First Nations, including Alderville First Nation. These initiatives support Northumberland County's continued reconciliation efforts, in line with a Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation Action Plan currently under development.

Background

Northumberland County is committed to fostering strong, respectful relationships with Indigenous Peoples and communities. The County has initiated ongoing engagement with recognized Rights Holder First Nations and Indigenous community members. These engagements are guided by a commitment to respect, cultural protocols, and collaboration.

An *Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation Action Plan* (IR&RAP) is currently under development, which will serve as a framework to guide the County's organizational approach for such engagement. The focus of the plan is to build deeper Indigenous cultural awareness and experience in order to foster enterprise-wide capacity for meaningful engagement with Indigenous communities, and support reconciliation. This effort is building a foundational base, aligning our actions with appropriate *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada* (TRC) Calls to Action and the principles of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP), with Nations whose traditional territories we have the privilege to operate on.

To further support County staff's understanding and ability to respectfully engage with Indigenous communities and staff, Northumberland County recognizes the importance of education and training focused on cultural awareness.

In 2020, Members of Council, senior leadership, and managers, participated in cultural awareness training through the Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres.

Building on this effort, the County recently organized Indigenous cultural awareness training sessions for front-line staff and supervisors. These sessions, attended by 150 employees from across the organization, were a meaningful step in deepening organizational understanding of Indigenous history, culture, and contemporary realities. Additional training sessions are being planned for the fall to continue building staff capacity and cultural awareness across departments.

Meaningful reconciliation begins with learning. It requires staff to first understand the truths of our shared history. By deepening our knowledge, staff can contribute to building respectful and collaborative relationships with Indigenous communities that are essential to the County's journey toward reconciliation, as well as essential to our organization's work.

Indigenous Cultural Training (Spring 2025)

Increasing Indigenous cultural awareness is essential to building an inclusive, empathetic, and respectful workplace. By acknowledging and honouring Indigenous perspectives, traditions, and histories in our work, Northumberland County is laying the foundation for meaningful reconciliation. This includes the critical work of recognizing our own cultural influences, unconscious biases, and the systemic structures that have contributed to the marginalization of Indigenous Peoples.

Through education, dialogue, and reflection, we are working to strengthen our collective capacity to engage with Indigenous communities in ways that are informed, respectful, and impactful. A key component of this effort is the delivery of foundational cultural awareness training for County staff.

We were honoured to partner, in May, with the First Peoples House of Learning at Trent University and Alderville First Nation's Cultural Coordinators. These partnerships were a key success for the training, bringing a depth of knowledge, lived experience, cultural integrity and hands-on training to the session.

Four half-day sessions were delivered over two days with overlapping training during an Indigenous lunch and cultural sharing. The training including the KAIROS Blanket Exercise (KBE)—a powerful and experiential learning opportunity developed in collaboration with Indigenous Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and educators from Trent University.

The KAIROS Blanket Exercise was an interactive session that guided staff through more than 500 years of shared history between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples in Canada and explored key moments such as pre-contact life, colonization, treaty-making, the Indian Residential School system, assimilation policies, resistance efforts, and the ongoing intergenerational impacts of these policies.

Each session concluded with a talking circle, creating a space for personal reflection, dialogue, and shared learning in a respectful and emotionally safe environment.

In addition, the training day included several cultural teachings and activities that helped deepen participants' understanding by:

- Actively participating in a smudging ceremony and explanation of its spiritual and cleansing significance
- An opportunity to participate in a tobacco offering, emphasizing the importance of intention, respect, and relational protocols
- A shared Indigenous lunch, providing space for informal conversation and cultural knowledge exchange that included drumming and signing
- Teachings about the Williams Treaties First Nations, who are the modern-day treaty holders in our region, situated within the traditional territory of the Michi Saagiig Anishinaabeg

Following the training, a post-session survey was conducted to gather feedback from staff on the experience. Results demonstrated:

- 94% of staff felt the facilitators were knowledgeable and engaging
- 82% indicated the training was valuable to their work
- 96% had the opportunity to participate during the training
- 98% reported increased understanding of historical and contemporary Indigenous issues
- 91% reported a better understanding of Williams Treaties First Nations and their history

- 94% reported they now have a better understanding of Indigenous ceremonies and practices such as smudging, tobacco offering, drumming and singing.
- 97% would recommend the workshop training for other staff

Selected comments from participants:

- *Thank you to the facilitators for sharing their knowledge, truths and stories. The exercise had the biggest impact on my opinion to visually SEE what happened.*
- *I have never taken a course through school or work, that has moved me as much as this exercise. I also believe that this training was extremely important for me in my position at the County to understand the importance of listening and problem solving.*
- *There are so many things I will take with me from this! Honestly, so many important pieces. I shared everything with my family at dinner!*
- *My key takeaway from this workshop was how the facilitators were able to deliver this education in an impactful / emotional way that meant more than learning it through text. I have already started to share my experience from this training to others in the community.*
- *After acknowledging the personal stories of those that shared, and understanding the truth of the past, I will now look for ways to improve the relationships of Indigenous peoples and settlers.*
- *I am motivated to learn more about the Indigenous communities that I live and work around (e.g., Curve Lake and Alderville)*
- *I feel more confident with protocols for approaching Elders for requests and opening and closing programs.*
- *This was the most engaging, immersive and thought-provoking workshop I have ever participated in.*
- *Amazing experience. I learnt so much and am also embarrassed by how little I knew/understood.*
- *That the presenters were incredibly good at speaking, and that the training itself was one of the most informative and impactful training sessions I have ever done.*

Future Training Efforts

To build on the foundational learning delivered through this spring training, the County is continuing to prioritize cultural awareness and competency development across the organization. In partnership with the First Peoples House of Learning at Trent University, plans are underway to offer a follow-up session this fall titled "Just Get Over It" that explores how colonial legacies continue to shape the lives of Indigenous individuals and communities today.

Recognizing the importance of tailoring cultural education to different service departments, the County is also working with Trent University to adapt this session to include a specialized health lens—supporting enhanced cultural competency for paramedics and Golden Plough Lodge staff as they serve Indigenous clients and residents.

Additional training is also being explored with Indigenous Corporate Training Inc. to provide targeted education on effective engagement and consultation with Indigenous Peoples, including specialized training for on how municipalities can effectively work with Indigenous

communities. These sessions will focus on best practices for building respectful, reciprocal relationships and navigating Indigenous consultation obligations in a meaningful way.

Ongoing Engagement with Williams Treaties First Nations, including Alderville First Nation

Northumberland County recognizes that genuine and effective consultation with Indigenous Rights Holder communities must be conducted in a way that respects established consultation protocols and ensures that staff capacity constraints are not a barrier to participation. As part of the County's commitment to reconciliation, we continue to follow community-defined processes and provide capacity supports, where appropriate, to enable meaningful engagement on projects that may impact Indigenous rights and interests.

Below are current examples of projects where the County is actively engaging with Williams Treaties First Nations and specifically with Alderville First Nation, along with – in some cases – Curve Lake FN and Scugog First Nations:

- **Brook Road North / Kerr Street – East Village Development:** The County is working closely with Alderville First Nation to ensure appropriate engagement on this development project, including archaeological assessments and environmental considerations.
- **Lot 16, Concession 9 – Culvert Relining Project:** Engagement is underway to review potential impacts to land and cultural heritage values.
- **Burnley Bridge Replacement:** A Stage 2 archaeological assessment is being conducted, with consultation initiated in accordance with the protocols of the affected First Nations and for which Alderville First Nation will be providing on-site Indigenous monitors.
- **Trent River Crossing:** As the project nears 90% design completion, the County is supporting a "whole-of-government" update and engagement process to ensure Indigenous perspectives are reflected in final planning and that Indigenous cultural considerations around plantings, and interpretive signage.
- **Baltimore Retaining Wall:** As the County prepares to remobilize construction activities over the summer, ongoing communication and consultation are being maintained with Alderville First Nation to address any outstanding concerns and consideration for the possible attendance of an Indigenous monitor.
- **473 Ontario Street – Archaeological Work:** A Stage 3 archaeological assessment is scheduled for the spring, with consultation initiated to incorporate Indigenous knowledge and ensure appropriate mitigation strategies. Indigenous monitors from Alderville First Nation (AFN) and HDI (Haudenosaunee Development Institute) were present for the Stage 2 on-site dig, and a letter of agreement is being developed for AFN monitors to be present for the Stage 3 work this spring.
- **County Road 64 – Phase 2 Urban Reconstruction:** This infrastructure project continues to advance with regular updates and consultation efforts to ensure transparency and consideration of Indigenous interests and updates on the temporary stream diversion and past relocations of turtle nests.

- **Broadband:** Working in respectful partnership with Alderville First Nation to ensure community needs are met and opportunities for enhanced high-speed internet connectivity are fully realized. Staff are working with Alderville First Nation to identify Alderville-owned lands and better understand both current and future broadband needs to build an AFN-specific project installation plan. Communications are being developed specifically for the Alderville community, to raise awareness – including community-specific outreach practices based on support from AFN staff, such as a number of in-community information sessions.
- **Intersection Safety – County Road 18 and Minnetonka Road:** In response to safety concerns raised by Chief and Council at the intersection of County Road 18 and Minnetonka Road, County staff conducted a site visit to assess conditions and review sight lines. Staff are working with AFN to deploy additional safety measures such as oversized stop sign and “Stop Ahead” signage.
- **TD Friends of the Environment Grant:** Partnership and letter of support from Alderville First Nation in support of the County’s application for a proposed Indigenous story walk and Indigenous tree plantings in Northumberland County Forest.

In all cases, the County is committed to providing timely information, respecting decision-making timelines, and, where necessary, supporting Indigenous community capacity funding to enable communities to participate fully in consultation processes.

Consultations

Training developed in consultation with Trent University’s First Peoples House of Learning and Alderville First Nations cultural coordinators

Legislative Authority / Risk Considerations

None

Discussion / Options

N/A

Financial Impact

Training provided through the annual Indigenous Training budget. Program remains under budget for 2025.

Member Municipality Impacts

N/A

Conclusion / Outcomes

Indigenous Training: The Indigenous training sessions were designed not only to educate, but to foster connection, empathy, and a stronger sense of shared responsibility among staff as part of the County’s reconciliation journey.

These learning opportunities represent an important step in the County’s efforts to build enterprise-wide awareness, respect, and capacity for Indigenous engagement. It also helps lay

the groundwork for future partnerships and the co-development of culturally appropriate programs and services.

Indigenous Engagement: The County is committed to providing timely information, and respecting decision-making timelines. County staff continue to expand their capacity and abilities with meaningful engagement and recognize that genuine and effective consultation with Indigenous Rights Holder communities must be conducted in a way that respects established consultation protocols and ensures that Indigenous community capacity constraints are not a barrier to participation. As part of our commitment to reconciliation, we continue to follow community-defined processes and provide capacity supports, where appropriate, to enable meaningful engagement on projects that may impact Indigenous rights and interests.

Staff recommend that Committee / Council receive this report for information.

Attachments

N/A