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## MANAGEMENT REPORT

**Date:** September 23, 2024  
**To:** Mayor and Council  
**From:** Kevin Bonnell, Manager of Inclusion, Equity and Indigenous Initiatives  
**Report Number:** COU24-110  
**Attachments:** None

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**Title:** Explore the Implementation of an Indigenous Medicine Wheel on City Property

**Objective:** To advise Council on the need to engage Indigenous peoples and knowledge keepers in the exploration and potential implementation of an Indigenous Medicine Wheel on City property. This includes identifying the scope, price range, space management, and suitable location for the Medicine Wheel.

**Background:** Over the last few years, the City has actively engaged with Indigenous communities to hear their stories and understand their needs in Stratford. This engagement has revealed a strong desire for visible recognition of Indigenous culture and heritage within Stratford. As part of the City's ongoing commitment to reconciliation and respecting Indigenous cultures, the idea of incorporating an Indigenous Medicine Wheel and Firepit—a sacred symbol representing holistic health, balance, and harmony—has emerged as a meaningful project that could enhance City public spaces. Stratford has a complex history with Indigenous peoples, rooted in both the presence of Indigenous communities and the impacts of colonization. While efforts have been made to recognize and celebrate Indigenous culture, there is a need for more tangible, visible representations within the city's public spaces.

This project aims to address that need and strengthen the relationship between the City and Indigenous communities. The City has been involved in several initiatives focused on Indigenous engagement, including events and collaborations that promote cultural awareness and education. However, there is limited permanent infrastructure that reflects Indigenous heritage. The proposal for an Indigenous Medicine Wheel and Firepit represents a significant step forward in creating a lasting, meaningful presence for Indigenous culture in Stratford. Through extensive consultations with Indigenous individuals and leaders, a recurring theme has been the desire for a dedicated space within the city for gathering, reflection, and learning. Existing spaces on private property are often inaccessible to the broader community, highlighting the need for a public space that is both inclusive and accessible. Additionally, there was a strong

emphasis on ensuring that the new space is accessible by water, which holds cultural significance for many Indigenous peoples. A significant consideration has been ensuring that the proposed site for the Medicine Wheel is fire-safe, given the potential for ceremonial fires. This risk is mitigated through coordination with the Stratford Fire Department. Another challenge is securing the necessary funding and resources to bring the project to fruition, which will be explored in partnership with Indigenous communities and through grant opportunities.

The City's Cultural Plan (2023-2028) emphasizes the importance of Indigenous knowledge, practices, and events as vital intangible cultural resources. Participants in the planning process highlighted the need for greater Indigenous representation, placekeeping, and reconciliation within the city. Notable Indigenous programs and events, such as the Indigenous Talking Circle and National Day for Truth and Reconciliation events, have shown the deep connections Indigenous people, creatives, and knowledge keepers have with Stratford. This project aligns with the Cultural Plan's recommendations under Pathway 4: Further Truth and Reconciliation Goals. The Plan emphasizes the importance of promoting and celebrating local Indigenous culture, increasing its visibility, and ensuring Indigenous communities are engaged in planning and decision-making processes. The Cultural Plan also stresses the importance of continuing to engage with nearby First Nations and local Indigenous communities to understand barriers to cultural development and identify actions to further opportunities for Indigenous people and culture in Stratford.

This approach also supports the City's Strategic Plan (2024-2027), which includes a focus on "Work Together for Greater Impact" by building meaningful partnerships to address community needs. The Strategic Plan further calls for "Intentionally Change to Support the Future" by implementing recommendations from the Municipal Cultural Plan to create programs that celebrate diversity and promote inclusion for everyone. The Indigenous Medicine Wheel project is a direct reflection of these strategic priorities, aiming to enhance the City's cultural landscape in a way.

**Analysis:** The implementation of an Indigenous Medicine Wheel involves several key steps:

1. Engagement with Indigenous Peoples and Knowledge Keepers: The City's first step is to consult with local Indigenous communities, including Elders and knowledge keepers, to gain their input on the design, scope, and appropriate use of the Medicine Wheel. This consultation will ensure that the project aligns with Indigenous cultural practices and serves as a true representation of their values.
2. Presentation to the Board of Park Management: A preliminary presentation was made to the Board of Park Management, which expressed interest in the project. However, the Board emphasized the need for further engagement with Indigenous peoples before finalizing the location and scope of the Medicine

Wheel. This additional consultation will be crucial in determining the most culturally appropriate and impactful way to proceed.

3. **Indigenous Engagement Working Group:** A key step in the implementation of the Indigenous Medicine Wheel project is the formation of a working group consisting of Indigenous Elders, knowledge keepers, community members, and youth. This group will guide the project by determining the scope, design, price range, and ideal location. Their involvement ensures that the project is culturally appropriate, reflective of Indigenous values, and meets the community's needs. This collaborative approach will also strengthen relationships with the Indigenous community and support ongoing reconciliation efforts.
4. **Identification of Scope and Price Range:** Through ongoing consultations, the City will identify the materials, labor, management, and resources required for the Medicine Wheel. This will help establish a preliminary budget for the project, including potential costs associated with land preparation, construction, and ongoing maintenance.
5. **Site Selection:** Working in collaboration with Indigenous communities, the City will identify a suitable location on City property that is both accessible and respectful of the cultural significance of the Medicine Wheel and Fire pit. The site should allow for public access while providing a serene and reflective environment. Further conversations with the Fire and Community Services Departments to help inform the location selection process.
6. **Educational Component:** Alongside the physical construction, it is recommended that the City consider incorporating educational elements, such as signage or interactive features, to educate the public about the significance of the Medicine Wheel and the teachings it represents.

### **Financial Implications:**

#### **Financial impact to current year operating budget:**

There is no financial impact to the current year operating budget.

#### **Financial impact on future year operating budget:**

At this point, no financial impacts have been identified, however, any future year impacts related to the Implementation of an Indigenous Medicine Wheel on City Property would be included in future budget submissions for Council consideration.

#### **Link to asset management plan and strategy:**

There are no links asset management plan and strategy currently.

## **Alignment with Strategic Priorities:**

### **Work Together For Greater Impact**

This report aligns with this priority as it highlights the City's commitment to building strong partnerships with Indigenous communities. By engaging Elders, knowledge keepers, and community members in the planning and design process of the Medicine Wheel, the City demonstrates its dedication to working together for a common goal. This approach not only strengthens relationships but ensures that the project reflects the values and cultural practices of the Indigenous peoples involved. Through collaboration, the City can create a meaningful space that promotes reconciliation and cultural recognition, supporting the needs of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous community members.

### **Intentionally Change to Support the Future**

This report aligns with this priority as the proposed Medicine Wheel project represents a forward-looking initiative that supports the City's vision for a more inclusive and diverse future. By following the recommendations of the Municipal Cultural Plan and emphasizing Indigenous representation, the City is intentionally fostering cultural diversity and inclusion. This project is more than just a physical space; it serves as an educational tool and a lasting commitment to honoring Indigenous heritage. The inclusion of educational components, such as signage explaining the significance of the Medicine Wheel, will help future generations understand the importance of Indigenous culture, paving the way for a more informed and inclusive community.

## **Alignment with One Planet Principles:**

### **Health and Happiness**

Encouraging active, social, meaningful lives to promote good health and wellbeing.

This report aligns with the focus on health and happiness by promoting the creation of meaningful, inclusive spaces like the Indigenous Medicine Wheel. Such spaces encourage active participation in community life, providing opportunities for reflection, connection, and learning. By fostering both physical and mental wellbeing, this project supports the City's commitment to promoting a healthier, more socially connected community.

### **Equity and Local Economy**

Creating safe, equitable places to live and work which support local prosperity and international fair trade.

The Indigenous Medicine Wheel project emphasizes equity by ensuring Indigenous voices and perspectives are central to the design and implementation process. By creating a public space that reflects Indigenous heritage, the City is building a more equitable community where all cultures are valued. This, in turn, supports local prosperity by strengthening partnerships with Indigenous communities and fostering a sense of belonging and fairness for all residents.

## **Culture and Community**

Nurturing local identity and heritage, empowering communities and promoting a culture of sustainable living.

This project nurtures local identity and heritage by visibly honoring Indigenous culture within Stratford's public spaces. The Medicine Wheel symbolizes holistic health and harmony, empowering communities to engage with and learn from Indigenous teachings. Through this initiative, the City promotes a culture of sustainability, respect, and shared responsibility for cultural preservation and community well-being.

**Staff Recommendation: THAT the report titled, "Explore the Implementation of an Indigenous Medicine Wheel on City Property" (COU24-110), be received for information.**

**Prepared by:** Kevin Bonnell, Manager of Inclusion, Equity and Indigenous Initiatives  
**Recommended by:** Dave Bush, Director of Human Resources  
Joan Thomson, Chief Administrative Officer