

# Vancouver council formally acknowledges city was built on unceded First Nations territory

By Matthew Coutts | [Daily Brew](#) – Wed, 25 Jun, 2014



Vancouver city council formally acknowledged Wednesday that the city was founded on land that still belongs to three First Nations communities, taking a large step forward in its mission of reconciliation.

Vancouver's planning, transportation and environment committee unanimously passed a [motion on Wednesday stating](#) that "the modern city of Vancouver was founded on the traditional territories of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh First Nations and that these territories were never ceded through treaty, war or surrender."

The motion also formally invited First Nations leaders to work with the mayor to develop protocols that "respect the traditions of welcome, blessing, and acknowledgement of the territory."

The move come days after the conclusion of a Year of Reconciliation in Vancouver, which was focused on mending relationships with Vancouver's First Nations community.

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Coun. Andrea Reimer, who championed the motion, said the city has been working for years to address the impact of past failures. Through discussions over the past year, they realized that this acknowledgement was long past due.

"This is a foundational truth that we are on the traditional land of these three First Nations, that they did not cede these territories to anyone, and here we are in this ambiguous place where the city of Vancouver also has a legal title and right of the city as well through the Canadian constitution and provincial charter. How do we find a pathway forward together?" Reimer told *Yahoo Canada News*.

"We felt the strongest step we could take was to acknowledge that we were not here first, that this is a traditional territory for these three Nations, and seek to find ways to properly acknowledge that this is their territory and honour their traditional protocols."

Indeed, much of British Columbia's coastland is territory never officially ceded by First Nations. This caused conflict in 2010, when Vancouver and Whistler held the [Winter Olympics](#) on unceded territory. And it is again prevalent in the debate over the [Northern Gateway pipeline](#) proposal, with First Nations groups that oppose the project claiming the government has no

official right over their coastal territory.

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The Tsleil-Waututh Nation states that it still holds a responsibility to protect its land, some of which sits under North Vancouver.

"While this territory was never ceded, nor our responsibility to this area ever abdicated, its resources have been exploited and damaged through industrialization and urbanization," reads a passage from its [website](#). "It is now, and has always been the birthright and the obligation of the Tsleil-Waututh people to care for the lands and waters of our territory and to restore them to their prior state."

David Schaepe, an official with the Sto:lo Nation, a council that represents 11 area First Nations, said he hoped Vancouver's decision to formally recognize its unceded territory would lead to other governments doing likewise. Cities such as Abbotsford, Chilliwack and Langley face similar situations.

"There's a limited recognition to—in some cases—almost no recognition of the relationship with the aboriginal peoples within those municipal boundaries," Schaepe told the [Georgia Straight](#), "and it's not fair and it's not healthy."

Whether Vancouver's acknowledgement creates a domino effect or simply fosters a healthier relationship between the city and its First Nations community, acknowledging the wrongs of the past is a positive step forward.

"I have heard some people say that it is better to let the past lie, but I just see the past play out in the present over and over in Vancouver, and I don't see how we move forward without find a way to reconcile that," Reimer said.

*(Photo courtesy of CBC)*

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