

# Indigenous Engagement Report

Kijipuktuk (Halifax) Regional Municipality Urban Forest Plan

**pipikwan pêhtâkwan**

10160 103 St NW

Edmonton, AB T5J 0X6

Phone: 587-254-3696

[pipikwanpehtakwan.com](http://pipikwanpehtakwan.com)



# Table of Contents

|                                                            |          |
|------------------------------------------------------------|----------|
| <b>Table of Contents.....</b>                              | <b>2</b> |
| <b>Project Overview.....</b>                               | <b>3</b> |
| Engagement Overview.....                                   | 4        |
| What Was Heard.....                                        | 6        |
| Recommendations.....                                       | 7        |
| Inclusion of Indigenous language.....                      | 7        |
| Malleability and community responsiveness in the plan..... | 9        |
| Appendix A: Urban Forest Dialogue.....                     | 11       |
| Project Overview.....                                      | 11       |
| Guide.....                                                 | 11       |
| Appendix B: Project Team.....                              | 13       |
| Peyton Meters (she/they).....                              | 13       |
| Engagement Manager.....                                    | 13       |
| Cole Buhler (he/him).....                                  | 13       |
| Media Relations Coordinator.....                           | 13       |
| Matt Ward (he/they).....                                   | 14       |
| Engagement Director.....                                   | 14       |

# Project Overview

In the Fall of 2023, Diamond Head Consulting approached pipikwan pêhtâkwan to build a partnership supporting diverse engagement in urban forest planning for the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM). pipikwan pêhtâkwan supported planning efforts and travelled to Kjiptuk (Halifax), Nova Scotia, in November 2023 and again in February 2024. We conducted engagement visits with various Indigenous Organizations and individual community members. Building relationships and getting to know the community is critical to this work. Indigenous People were identified as a gap in the previous Urban Forest Management Plan (UFMP) version. Our team members visited to understand better the Indigenous community in and around Kjiptuk (Halifax) and their priorities. We met Elders, youth, and community members who identified the needs and gaps within the current context of the UFMP and the HRM itself.

In another vein of the project, pipikwan pêhtâkwan has supported the continued dialogues with new immigrant community members and people with disabilities. At the time of this report, only preliminary dialogues have occurred. Dialogues are scheduled to be completed by June 2024. An appendix of findings will be included to reflect those dialogues.

## Key Findings

The Indigenous engagement identified the following as key priorities, which are expanded upon in the report's Key Findings section.

- Inclusion of Indigenous language
- Protected species of cultural significance (Birch, Black Ash and White Ash)
- Urban, accessible and safe space for Ceremony and healing
- Indigenous collaborations and partnerships
- Food forest development
- Increased education and knowledge sharing
- Malleability and community responsiveness in the plan
- Protection and restoration after natural disaster

## About pipikwan pêhtâkwan

pipikwan pêhtâkwan is an Indigenous-owned, -led, majority-staffed public relations and engagement agency. We focus on elevating Indigenous voices and their stories and facilitating meaningful engagement and planning to build trust and lasting relationships with Indigenous communities. We primarily serve Indigenous businesses, organizations and communities to bring their voices to the mainstream media and general public while ensuring Indigenous Peoples maintain ownership of their initiatives and stories.

At pipikwan pêhtâkwan, we pride ourselves on being helpers who understand the barriers and know the language that resonates with our Peoples. We collaborate with our partners to build communications strategies that work for Indigenous communities. Our vision, mission, and values guide us as we engage existing and new clients.

## Engagement Overview

In November 2023 and February 2024, various community sessions were held to listen to community members share their priorities, values and experiences. These conversations helped the team identify gaps and opportunities the Indigenous Community had regarding the updated Urban Forest Management Plan.

A range of perspectives was heard throughout the community—pipikwan pêhtâkwan connected with 71 people affiliated with eight different Indigenous organizations through multiple facilitated visits and interviews.

The goal of these engagement visits was to listen to the community, provide clarity, and share any gaps or concerns with the client on behalf of the community. These findings will inform recommendations and themes that may impact the revision to the previous UFMP and the development of a healthy urban forest for all residents of Kjiptuk (Halifax).

Additionally, pipikwan pêhtâkwan supported several public engagement sessions alongside Diamond Head Consulting Ltd in February 2024. Our role was to be available for potential Indigenous community participation. The collaboration also supported improved alignment and understanding of how each approach could inform the writing of the UFMP. Two Indigenous community members (a mother and son) attended one public engagement session.

## Methodology

We honour the territory of the Mi'kmaq peoples, where Kjiptuk (Halifax) is situated. While our company brings a unique Indigenous lens to this work, we acknowledge the unique history, context, culture, language, and ongoing realities of the Mi'kmaq peoples and want to build meaningful relationships that recognize this. Our team was grateful and honoured to uplift historically marginalized voices in this work and believe the partnership with Diamond Head Consulting Ltd. allowed us to do this work well.

As part of this project, pipikwan pêhtâkwan developed an engagement strategy to facilitate engagement sessions and activities with local Indigenous communities relying on keeoukaywin, The Visiting Way (Gaudet, 2019) to build lasting relationships with Indigenous partners rooted in trust and reciprocity. keeoukaywin is based on Métis and Cree knowledge systems rooted in relationality. This approach centres on the importance of conversation and connection and acknowledges the critical way these connections manifest in the outcomes of the work. The engagement team worked with Diamond Head Consulting Ltd, Delvina Bernard, and the City of Halifax to identify existing and new relationships to guide this work and interviewed key partners with insight into the project.

Another approach to our work is etuaptmumk or two-eyed seeing. The term was coined by Elder Albert Marshall of Eskasoni in Unama'ki, Nova Scotia. Through this approach, we work directly alongside our

partners, such as Diamond Head Consulting, to deliver a product that combines the best of the Municipality and public perspectives with traditional knowledge of the Indigenous people in and around Kjiipuktuk (Halifax).

## Approach

- Individual Visits (Interviews)
  - The purpose of visiting is to use engagement techniques in a decolonized approach that emphasizes relationality and the accountability of visiting. The goal is to approach these visits as the beginning of a relationship. In some cases, multiple visits were required before work could begin.
  - We facilitated individual visits in cases where travel to a collective space was difficult for an individual or where a participant may have been identified and recommended by a participant later in the engagement process.
- Group Visits (Focus Groups)
  - pipikwan pêhtâkwan organized small group visits with organizations with multiple participants interested in sharing perspectives. Each session was formatted and adapted to meet the individual group's needs. Groups included participants such as Elders, Grandmothers, Indigenous Leadership, Indigenous community members and Indigenous experts in relevant sectors.
  - The purpose of the small group visit is to create an environment where many voices can be heard and build off each other. Using Circle process, we can create a culturally sensitive space responsive to different experiences, knowledge and understanding of a topic.
- Collaboration
  - pipikwan pêhtâkwan shared engagement boards used in public engagement with Indigenous participants. While not an Indigenous-specific approach, this approach allowed us to compare findings from public engagement alongside Indigenous dialogue. In particular, we understand how community members currently and would like to engage with the urban forest.

## Participants

pipikwan pêhtâkwan made direct outreach to communities in the Halifax region to build new or expand upon existing relationships, doing our best to ensure that both urban Indigenous perspectives and rights-holding First Nations communities were meaningfully engaged in this project. Partners engaged as part of this work are reflected below:

- Members of Wasoqopa'q First Nation (Acadia)
- Wijewinen - Mi'kmaw Friendship Centre (multiple programs)
- Diamond Bailey Healing Centre
- Dalhousie Indigenous Student Centre
- Kiknu Indigenous Student Centre (St. FX University)

- Native Council of Nova Scotia
- Sipekne'katik Treaty Truck House
- Aboriginal Youth Outreach Program

## Questions

Please see the appendix for the outline of facilitation used to support this engagement. Some of the guiding questions used to support this reporting included:

1. How do you *connect* with the urban forest?
2. How do you *support* the urban forest?
3. How do you *use* the urban forest?
4. What needs do you, your clients, or community have around the urban forest? What are the current gaps?
5. Have you seen or heard about other ways to connect Indigenous knowledge to the land that you think are important to HRM?
6. If you opened the UFMP, how would you know Indigenous People were involved?
7. How would you know the HRM Urban Forest plan was successful? What would you need to see?
8. What would you have to see to want to be involved in the UFMP in an ongoing, and meaningful, way?

## What Was Heard

### Reflections

- Our team learned that meaningfully supporting these relationships can be challenging without an Indigenous Framework to support direct relationships with the First Nations in which the Halifax Regional Municipality works. Some engaged communities identified their approaches to engagement, which the HRM should meaningfully reflect on and incorporate into their engagement processes.
- At the request of First Nation communities with reserve lands within the HRM (Wasoqopa'q, Sipekne'katik, and Millbrook), an increased engagement window and a letter from the Municipality requesting formal engagement were provided. Through follow-up dialogue, it was learned that Nations were already collaborating on land priorities with a department at the HRM and would use that relationship to bring forward their priorities and concerns. HRM should assess and reflect on how internal information sharing is being done and how HRM is ensuring that Indigenous priorities are being included in relevant work.

## **Recommendations**

### **Inclusion of Indigenous language**

A UFMP with local Indigenous languages (Mi'kmawí'simk) elevated within it would connect stronger with Indigenous community members. Suggestions for including Indigenous language were: a) exploring a naming Ceremony for the title of the plan; b) Using traditional place names when referring to locations; c) Using traditional names for flora and fauna; and d) Ensuring Mi'kmawí'simk words preceded the English descriptions.

Language revitalization was of particular importance to youth. Participants shared that language is a connection between Elders and youth. As the language is verb-based, opportunities to learn the language and embody the understandings that come alongside it are important for a holistic plan for the future.

### **Protected species of cultural significance**

Many species of trees and medicines have been used historically for Indigenous practices. Trees, such as the birch, have been harvested for canoes and baskets since time immemorial and are still practiced today. There are significant teachings around species, such as black and white ash. Where black ash is more commonly used today, it was shared that traditionally, white ash was a significant species ingrained in the Mi'kmaq creation story. Indigenous community members would like to see additional protections for these species, along with a restoration plan.

Trees such as cedar are used as an Indigenous medicine and are very valuable to Indigenous ceremonies; providing access to these types of resources within city limits can alleviate many cultural barriers Indigenous people have in accessing traditional materials.

### **Accessible and safe urban ceremony space**

Within the HRM, Indigenous community members made significant mention of a need for an accessible and safe location for ceremony and a healing garden; references compare a space similar to the Halifax Public Gardens to the missing needs of the urban Indigenous community.

Indigenous community members acknowledge that there would need to be ongoing dialogue with Elders and organizations about *how* best to create a safe and sacred space. Needs identified were: a) A dedicated space for Ceremonies such as Sweat Lodge and sacred fires; b) a medicine and berry garden; and c) a reflective space to pray and connect with land abundant with flora and fauna.

Many Indigenous people who live throughout the Kijipuktuk (Halifax) area need more access to traditional lands for ceremony practice. Of the thirteen (13) zones structured under the Native Council of Nova Scotia, it was shared that two (2) zones cover the HRM boundaries, with more than 50% of the total membership residing in these areas. Being on the land is essential for Indigenous People to access teachings, traditional medicines, and a place to practice ceremonies. Facilitating access to urban forest space to accommodate Indigenous Ceremonies would benefit Indigenous communities, the connection

to land, and the sustainability of nature within the urban forest.

An immediate need identified was connecting to natural spaces for spirituality and healing. Many low-income neighbourhoods in the HRM do not have direct access to abundant vegetation or a deeper connection to the land. Innovative solutions, like increased access to public transportation or complimentary taxi vouchers, help provide access to existing urban forest spaces so everyone who wants to use green space in the community can. Currently, some families may not be able to afford the cost of public transportation or a vehicle to get to these locations. This would provide more immediate solutions to neighbourhoods that do not have green space until such a time that HRM can co-create a sacred space for Indigenous People.

### **Indigenous collaborations and partnerships**

Programs that bloom from the UFMP—for example, the current tree giveaway program—must include Indigenous collaborators and partners if they aim to increase Indigenous participation. Rather than HRM aiming to manage Indigenous engagement in community programs, Indigenous participants shared that they would need to *see* Indigenous people leading these initiatives to know they were meant for them. There was a strong willingness to support and develop common goals and programs that could be led by Indigenous organizations, with reciprocity and shared resources from the municipality.

Indigenous participants across *every* engagement referred to a need for more collaboration between the HRM and Indigenous organizations. As mentioned in our reflections, opportunities to grow Indigenous participation will remain limited without a municipal-wide Indigenous Framework to support relationships.

It should be noted that collaboration and partnerships were separate from the relationship between the HRM and Indigenous organizations. More clarity from the community is needed on why Parks and Urban Forestry departments within the HRM were independent. While fragmentation of roles and responsibilities can be helpful in a municipal planning space, Indigenous participants wish to see stronger collaborations between departments within the HRM teams. By strengthening internal collaboration, HRM will streamline dialogues and reduce the burden on Indigenous organizations to navigate the system when aiming to work with HRM. The need for a simplified process to bring concerns about urban forests (including parks areas) forward was especially true for some nations that still need to participate in a full-scale engagement. One Nation, in particular, identified that they were already working on priorities with one department and did not feel it was an effective use of their limited time to engage on a similar issue with a separate department. Urban Forestry would benefit from evaluating its internal process for information sharing and partnership with alternative departments.

## **Food forest development**

Building a substantial food forest is an opportunity to create space that supports community food sovereignty. While there are community gardens and fruit-bearing trees and bushes within the HRM, Indigenous participants discussed the need for a more abundant food forest with improved access for Indigenous People. The factors identified that would create a thriving food forest were: a) Higher density of food forest in places where houseless community members reside; b) Access to a variety of foods less common to a typical food forest, for example, corn, squash and beans; c) Development of vertical farming spaces; and d) Increased development of pollinator programs.

## **Increased education and knowledge sharing**

To create a UFMP that is diverse and inclusive of Indigenous epistemology, participants recommended a co-created education plan that would bridge Indigenous perspectives into the UFMP for both Indigenous community members and the general public. Similarly to including Indigenous language, participants saw broad education as an opportunity to embody *etuaptmumk*. Many groups discussed the knowledge that Elders, Knowledge Keepers and Grandmothers shared around a) traditional and medicinal uses for various species, b) sustainable harvesting practices, c) biodiversity, and d) traditional ecological knowledge on companion planting and growing.

There was additional dialogue about the need for Indigenous-specific education that included Indigenous pedagogy, such as oral teachings, learning through experience, and land-based learning. These suggested opportunities identify a need for HRM to develop ongoing outreach and community engagement pathways.

## **Malleability and community responsiveness in the plan**

The needs of Indigenous People within the HRM are continuously evolving. As organizations advance their individual and collective goals, new opportunities to collaborate with Indigenous People will present themselves. Participants indicated that a malleable plan responsive to community priorities would be preferred. The previous duration of a ten (10) year plan was considered prohibitive to meaningful and ongoing Indigenous engagement.

Dialogue related to evolving priorities included: a) land-back initiatives in park areas; b) species reclamation; c) carbon-tax credit legislation and economic return to communities; d) Indigenous placemaking; e) development of programming for Indigenous community members; f) Youth engagement and education; g) new building initiatives and green infrastructure; h) sustainability and growing technologies; and i) Indirect, yet interconnected, initiatives such as salmon restoration.

Indigenous participants noted that a plan that provided opportunities for ongoing engagement and decision-making would strengthen Indigenous alignment with the UFMP. Having parts of the plan be developed continuously creates space for Indigenous communities to invite new voices to the table as engagement increases. Ideas shared on how this could be successful were: a) a Circle that informed a series of annual priorities outside of more significant priorities within the UFMP; b) a community liaison

role, focused on relationship building and advancing Indigenous ideas and initiatives - for example, natural playground developments; and c) annually funding allowance and resource sharing for Indigenous organizations to contribute to collective goals in their own, culturally sensitive way.

### **Protection and restoration after natural disaster**

Halifax is a hurricane-prone area located on the coast of the Atlantic Ocean. This puts the urban forest within the HRM at risk of significant damage during these events. These storms result in house loss, vegetation loss, and life restructuring. The youth hope for a sustainable plan that helps repair lost vegetation during storms and practise preventative measures to protect and nurture the vegetation during these losses. As the severity of these storms increases due to climate change, youth are invested in the protection and sustainability of the urban forest for future generations. These concerns were particularly high for urban land returned to Nations impacted by wildfire or hurricane natural disasters - for example, the area near Hammonds Plains belonging to wasoqopa'q (Acadia First Nation).

# Appendices

## Appendix A: Urban Forest Dialogue

### Project Overview

- pipikwan pêhtâkwan has been contracted to expand Indigenous representation and voices for the revamped Urban Forest Plan with the HRM. We work for Diamondhead Inc, who is the contract holder for the HRM (show What is Urban Forest Management Plan)
- The major goal of that plan was canopy coverage and there were some great successes that came from that (Show the Region-wide Tree Canopy Cover & the How is the urban forest distributed in the urban core?)
- There have been many changes to the Urban Forest in Kjiptuk (Halifax) over the years, unrelated to the trees, but they make an impact there. There are many challenges that your specific urban forest is facing (show What challenges does our urban forest face?)
- This time around, we are seeking to adjust, make improvements, and introduce a new set of values to the Plan.
- The timeline of the project - engagement goes until end of March 2024 - a plan is intended to be drafted by May - that plan will get presented back to everyone who has participated if they would like to leave their email with us.
- We are interested in learning more about your specific interactions and hopes for the urban forest, but also we are here to listen and elevate your voice, so at any time, if you have thoughts jump in and share. If they aren't directly related to urban forestry, we will still ensure they are collected and shared with the appropriate team at HRM.

### Guide

| Activity                  | Lead                  | Description                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Welcome/<br>Introductions | pipikwan<br>pêhtâkwan | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Placing and intros from pipikwan team, Diamondhead, HRM, and the participants</li><li>• Provide all participants with honorarium and protocol. Provide them with an overview of how OCAP is being upheld in the engagement process.</li></ul> |
| Project<br>Overview       |                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Share about the importance, scope and background of the project.</li><li>• Share documents noted as attached</li></ul>                                                                                                                        |

|                    |                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|--------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Open Questions     |                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Just at the start of the dialogue, would you be comfortable sharing a little about your connections, maybe a story, about how you have connected with the urban forest in the past? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How do you connect with the urban forest? Or how do you see other Indigenous people connecting to the urban forest?</li> </ul> </li> <li>Go over the previous plan, goals and the current scope of work. What is the first thing to comes to mind when you think about this work and a revised Urban Forest Management Plan?</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| Specific Questions |                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Show the two engagement boards collective to all engagements. How do you <i>support</i> the urban forest? &amp; How do you <i>use</i> the urban forest? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ask them to share their reflections.</li> </ul> </li> <li>What needs do you, your clients, or community have around the urban forest? Where are the current gaps?</li> <li>Have you seen or heard about other ways to connect Indigenous knowledge to the land that you think are important to HRM?</li> <li>If you opened the UFMP, how would you know Indigenous People were involved? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What would you have to physically see in a plan?</li> <li>What values would you see reflected?</li> </ul> </li> <li>How would you know the HRM Urban Forest plan was successful? What would you need to see?</li> <li>What would you have to see to want to be involved in the UFMP in an ongoing, and meaningful, way?</li> </ul> |
| Next Steps         | pipikwan<br>pêhtâkwan | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify next steps of the project and how the team will follow-up with notes from the discussion</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |

## Appendix B: Project Team



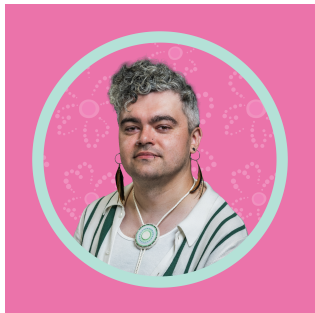
### **Peyton Meters (she/they) Engagement Manager**

Peyton was born in Newfoundland and Labrador and comes from Mi'kmaq and settler ancestors. She graduated from the Indigenous Bachelor of Social Work program at Yellowhead Tribal College. Previously, they earned a Social Work Diploma from MacEwan University. Today, Peyton resides on Treaty 8 Territory and calls Grande Prairie, AB, home.

As an environmental social worker, Peyton enjoys connecting tradition to practice and finding ways to elevate safety, confidence, and engagement in those who dialogue with her. Her approach is person-centred, meaning Peyton will spend the time needed to get to know someone and find a shared space of relationality in her work.

Professionally, Peyton has over 11 years of experience in facilitation, strategic planning, and teaching within the non-profit sphere. Her strength is in helping to bring groups together where people can dialogue and share their voices. She cares deeply about respect and empathy and uses both in her engagement methodologies.

In her personal time, Peyton loves to travel with her partner and explore the traditions and ceremonies of other Peoples and lands. At home, you will easily find her fishing or creating art.



### **Cole Buhler (he/him) Media Relations Coordinator**

Cole Buhler, Bachelor of Communications, MacEwan University, is a media relations coordinator at pipikwan pêhtâkwan. He is nehiyaw (Cree) through both of his kokums and mixed European through his grandfathers. Cole is from the Peace Region in Treaty No. 8 Territory, but has lived in amiskwaciwâskahikan (Edmonton) for 15 years. Cole grew up disconnected from his family, which has led him on a path of rediscovery and belonging.

Cole enjoys working in partnership with Indigenous communities, helping Peoples tell their truths through unique, innovative storytelling. He enjoys managing media projects and problem-solving for community-focused organizations such as supportive housing cooperatives, non-profit organizations and harm reduction initiatives.

Cole is passionate about public speaking – he regularly guest lectures at MacEwan University, teaching students how to interview Indigenous Peoples through a trauma-informed lens; he regularly presents at the University of Alberta, teaching employees how to decolonize communication and marketing; and he has spoken at the IABC World Conference on decolonizing communications.

Cole is an avid photographer, essayist, and fiction writer. Some of his other interests include reading, gardening, and cycling.

Cole also has a passion for volunteering. He volunteered as an education abroad resource assistant with the International Office at MacEwan in the winter of 2020 after studying abroad in 2018 and 2019. He taught English poetry and literature at the Nagasaki University of Foreign Studies in Nagasaki, Japan, and took courses in international public relations at Queen Margaret University in Edinburgh, Scotland.



### **Matt Ward (he/they) Engagement Director**

Matt Ward (he/they) is a queer, mixed nehiyaw person and member of Driftpile Cree Nation in Treaty 8 territory. They grew up on the shores of Lesser Slave Lake but have called amiskwaciwâskahikan (Edmonton) home collectively for over ten years.

Matt completed his undergraduate degree in Critical Indigenous Studies and Political Science at the University of British Columbia in 2015. His career has included strategic planning, research, engagement, workshop delivery and strategy development. He has worked in multiple sectors throughout his career, including human services, community safety, student organizing, health, and environment, and he has spent seven years in Edmonton's housing and homelessness sector. They are a dedicated volunteer in Edmonton's human services, arts, and Indigenous spaces. In 2021, he received Alberta's Top 30 Under 30 Award; in 2022, he received Edmonton's Top 40 Under 40 Award.

Matt enjoys exploring their downtown neighbourhood, playing video games, and collaborating on projects with friends and organizations celebrating Indigenous joy. After long days, he can be found lounging on his condo patio with his fiancé, Eric, and their cat, Mr. Business.