



**City of Kingston  
Information Report to Council  
Report Number 18-354**

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<b>To:</b>	<b>Mayor and Members of Council</b>
<b>From:</b>	<b>Lanie Hurdle, Commissioner, Community Services</b>
<b>Resource Staff:</b>	<b>Colin Wiginton, Cultural Director, Cultural Services</b>
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	<b>September 18, 2018</b>
<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Your Stories, Our Histories Public Engagement Project, 2018-2019</b>

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**Executive Summary:**

The purpose of this information report is to provide Council with an update regarding the Your Stories, Our Histories public engagement project that launched on September 6, 2018. This work builds on ideas first introduced in 2010 through the Kingston Culture Plan and that have been further explored through subsequent strategies such as the Integrated Cultural Heritage and Cultural Tourism Strategy (2014) and the Kingston Commemorations Strategy (2015). Whereas the Kingston Culture Plan proposed that Kingston's most compelling cultural asset is its powerful historical narrative, it has since been identified that work needs to be done to ensure that narrative includes a broader representation of histories.

The goal of the current public engagement project is to initiate a community conversation in order to hear what people think about how the City of Kingston is representing local history and to capture input about stories and/or histories that are less well known or less frequently profiled. The intent is not to erase history or to remove elements that are part of local and national history; rather, it is about shedding light on and recognizing all histories and ensuring that the public has access to these stories. The input that is received will contribute to the development of an updated Cultural Heritage Strategy for the City of Kingston that will be used to help guide the development of exhibits, programs and events offered through the Cultural Services Department. It also provides an opportunity for the community to have a discussion about how history evolves over time in order to develop a historical narrative for Kingston that is more inclusive and balanced than it has been in the past. This report reviews the context for the development of this public engagement initiative, the current and future components of the project, and the timeline for the project's completion.

**Recommendation:**

This report is for information purposes only.

September 18, 2017

Page 2 of 7

**Authorizing Signatures:**

ORIGINAL SIGNED BY COMMISSIONER

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**Lanie Hurdle, Commissioner, Community Services**

ORIGINAL SIGNED BY CHIEF INFORMATION OFFICER

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**Gerard Hunt, Chief Administrative Officer**

**Consultation with the following Members of the Corporate Management Team:**

Jim Keech, President & CEO, Utilities Kingston	Not required
Desirée Kennedy, Chief Financial Officer & City Treasurer	Not required
Denis Leger, Commissioner, Corporate & Emergency Services	Not required

September 18, 2017

Page 3 of 7

**Background:**

The [Kinston Culture Plan](#) (ARCP-10-034), developed through an extensive community engagement and planning exercise, proposed that Kingston's most compelling cultural asset is its powerful historical narrative. The Kingston Culture Plan went on to suggest that Kingston's many stories need to be developed in compelling ways and told through a variety of means and opportunities. Telling stories is not the mandate of the City alone; however, but is a shared responsibility of the community. The Kingston Culture Plan called upon the City of Kingston to play a leadership role to foster and coordinate a community-wide approach to history and heritage.

Identified in recommendation three of the Kingston Culture Plan is the development of a cultural heritage strategy that can be used to develop and support community programs, events and exhibitions that tell the story of Kingston and are a key component to Kingston's cultural vitality. In the years that have followed the approval of the Kingston Culture Plan, staff have worked to address the plan's recommendations.

This work has involved the alignment of many initiatives around sector development such as heritage funding and cultural tourism, as well as long range planning related to the exhibits and programs offered through City-owned museums and sites. This work began with the Integrated Cultural Heritage and Cultural Tourism Strategy approved in 2014 ([ARCP-14-001](#)) and has continued through the development of subsequent documents such as the Kingston Commemorations Strategy in 2015 ([ARCP-15-008](#)). Further work has also been pursued through other strategic projects such as the Engage for Change: YGK Reconciliation Journey that began in 2017. At each step, staff have worked to foster dialogue regarding people, places, events and ideas that can be leveraged to shape a broader understanding of local history that is more inclusive and balanced.

While developing the Kingston Commemorations Strategy, a number of specific thematic areas were identified as being under-represented and were established as priority areas for future commemorative efforts. The priority thematic areas identified were First Peoples, Ethno-cultural communities, Francophone and Women. These high-level thematic "gaps" in commemorations have contributed to the current consideration of what other histories may be underrepresented or even missing in terms of what is being shared. It is for this reason that staff have launched the current public engagement project, Your Stories, Our Histories, in an effort to initiate a community conversation that will guide the development of exhibits, programs and events offered by the City of Kingston.

**Your Stories, Our Histories**

The intent of the Your Stories, Our Histories public engagement project is to prompt a community conversation in order to hear what people think about how the City of Kingston is representing local history and to capture input about stories and/or histories that are less well known or less frequently profiled.

September 18, 2017

Page 4 of 7

As a first step, people are being invited to share their input and ideas about stories that need to be told as well as histories that may need to be updated or re-contextualized. Input is also being sought about how history evolves and whose voices are being heard.

The feedback received as part of this first phase of work will be used to shape a series of more formal facilitated engagements beginning in early 2019. These engagement opportunities will help the City develop a prioritized list of interpretive themes/topics that can be used to develop specific exhibits, installations, programs and events within Kingston City Hall as well as across other City-owned sites across the community. It will also address specific themes that have been identified through previous community conversations, to develop a broader understanding of local history.

### **Get Involved Kingston**

The Your Stories, Our Histories project has been developed using the Public Engagement Framework approved by Council in 2017 and the first phase of work was launched on September 6, 2018 using [GetInvolved.CityofKingston.ca](http://GetInvolved.CityofKingston.ca) to start the process of community engagement. The online engagement begins with the text below:

Kingston, as a community, has evolved and changed over time and we're asking for your help to ensure the histories we share capture as many different stories as possible.

In the coming months, we are inviting the community to participate in a conversation about local history that will help to inform the kinds of exhibits, events and programs the City of Kingston offers. This work has been on-going but, in this moment, we want to dive deeper to understand what stories are being told well, what stories are being missed and how we can work with the community to make sure the stories we share are inclusive and reflect in an accurate way what makes Kingston a unique and dynamic place.

Through this engagement process we will work with the community to identify a list of themes, issues and topics that could be used to develop future programming that includes exhibits, events and educational offerings on-site at Kingston City Hall as well as across other City-owned sites.

This is important work that requires your participation. Our understanding of history is constantly evolving and we invite you to join in on this opportunity so we can work together to ensure your stories inform how we tell our histories so Kingston is regarded as a welcoming, inclusive and safe space for residents and visitors alike.

Visitors to the site are then invited to share their input by submitting their story. The guiding text reads:

As we start this conversation, we need your help to ensure your stories help our histories to be as inclusive as possible. Please share your stories that may be less well known but are important to capture. If you don't have a story you can also

September 18, 2017

Page 5 of 7

share your thoughts and ideas about local history so we can capture a diversity of themes, issues and ideas that are worth exploring.

Please remember that this is a safe space for you to share your thoughts, feelings and opinions. By sharing, you are helping to foster a community conversation. We ask that if you are inclined to use strong language that you do so in a responsible, respectful manner. Words are powerful, so please choose them wisely.

As previously stated, the feedback received as part of this first phase of work will be used to shape a series of more formal facilitated engagements beginning in early 2019.

### **A Historic Relationship and a Continuing Story: Sir John A. Macdonald**

As part of Your Stories, Our Histories, dealing with the history and legacy of Sir John A. Macdonald in a Kingston context was unavoidable. Over the last several years, a national dialogue has been unfolding and specific actions have been taken that make Sir John A. Macdonald a focal point for discussion about how history is written and by whom and there has also been increasing attention put on Sir John A. Macdonald and his treatment of Indigenous peoples and issues. This has emerged at the same time that Canada, as a nation, is also dealing with the recommendations issued as part of the publication of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's findings in 2015. In this moment, it is difficult for the City of Kingston to avoid addressing the issues that have emerged around Sir John A. Macdonald, especially in relation to a stated desire to develop a broader understanding of local history that is more inclusive and balanced. The fact also remains that Kingston is widely recognized as Sir John A. Macdonald's hometown so the opportunity exists to leverage the uniqueness of this relationship to engage in a discussion from a local perspective.

As the debate around Sir John A. Macdonald has escalated in recent months, staff recognized the need to foster, rather than to avoid, discussion regarding his history and legacy within a Kingston context. In this moment, as a diversity of opinions are being shared across the country and beyond, it is important this conversation include the City of Kingston and its residents. Therefore, as part of the launch of the Your Stories, Our Histories project, people are being invited to participate in a conversation about Sir John A. Macdonald and to offer their thoughts about how best tell his story in the context of the larger work that is needed to develop a cultural heritage strategy for the City of Kingston. It is important to note that the intent of this community process is to collect input related to the Sir John A. Macdonald debate locally and to be able to share this input with the public. The intent is not to try to erase local or national history or to remove elements related to this history.

As part of this undertaking, staff is adding the text to the existing interpretive plaques and panels connected to City-owned artifacts found in and around Kingston in order to provide additional context. These include the book plaques adjacent to the Sir John A. Macdonald statue in City Park and Engine 1095 in Confederation Park, as well as in Kingston City Hall as part of the installation in the Sir John A. Macdonald room and next to his portrait in Memorial Hall. The intent of the text is to acknowledge the national dialogue within the context of reconciliation so that visitors and residents know that the City of Kingston is aware and committed to working to develop an approach to local history that is inclusive and balanced.

September 18, 2017

Page 6 of 7

Staff have also modified the existing installation in the Sir John A. Macdonald room located within Kingston City Hall. As of September 6, 2018, this exhibit now includes an interactive installation that is meant to foster dialogue around Sir John A. Macdonald within the context of the “Your Stories, Our Histories” project. Within this installation, visitors are encouraged to explore and reflect on the written and visual resources that have been made available and also to explore and reflect on the comments left by other visitors.

**Engagement Timeline and Next Steps**

The Your Stories, Our Histories public engagement project is intended to continue through 2019 through a series of more formal facilitated engagements. The opportunity to contribute stories both at City Hall as well as through the online portal will continue throughout the engagement, and the input received will contribute to the identification of themes and topics to be more deeply addressed as part of the public engagement events that will happen over the first half of 2019. The project will result in a findings report that captures the stories, themes and directions that arose throughout the engagement. This report will then be used to shape a Cultural Heritage Strategy that can be used to guide the development of exhibit, installations, programming and events to be offered by the City of Kingston.

**Existing Policy/By Law:**

Not applicable

**Notice Provisions:**

Not applicable

**Accessibility Considerations:**

Not applicable

**Financial Considerations:**

Not applicable

**Contacts:**

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**Other City of Kingston Staff Consulted:**

Jennifer Campbell, Manager, Cultural Heritage, Cultural Services

**Other City of Kingston Staff Consulted:**

Not applicable

September 18, 2017

Page 7 of 7

**Exhibits Attached:**

Not applicable