

Section I – Items for Board of Directors Action

TO: Chair and Members of the Board of Directors
Friday, April 28, 2023 Meeting

FROM: Darryl Gray, Director, Education and Training

RE: **PROPOSED RENAMING OF BLACK CREEK PIONEER VILLAGE TO THE VILLAGE AT BLACK CREEK**
Staff proposal to rename Black Creek Pioneer Village to The Village at Black Creek

KEY ISSUE

In order to continue to advance efforts related to reconciliation with indigenous communities and inclusion of diverse populations within the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) and Ontario, it is proposed that Black Creek Pioneer Village's name be changed to The Village at Black Creek.

RECOMMENDATION:

WHEREAS TORONTO AND REGION CONSERVATION AUTHORITY (TRCA), in partnership with the Government of Ontario, City of Toronto and local municipalities, established Black Creek Pioneer Village in 1960 to preserve, protect and share the built and cultural history of Ontario and the GTA through the form of a living history museum;

AND WHEREAS Black Creek Pioneer Village consists of one of Ontario's largest collections of historic buildings with local, provincial and national significance from the pre- and post-confederation period;

AND WHEREAS TRCA has undertaken efforts to modernize and improve programming and service offerings at Black Creek Pioneer Village to reflect both the diverse history of the GTA from the indigenous pre-colonial era through to the current multicultural metropolis of Toronto and surrounding regions;

AND WHEREAS the word "Pioneer" has been identified as a barrier to efforts related to reconciliation and engagement in this important cultural attraction for indigenous and multi-cultural communities;

THEREFORE LET IT BE RESOLVED THAT BLACK CREEK PIONEER VILLAGE be renamed The Village at Black Creek;

THAT TRCA staff undertake necessary steps to update all appropriate branding, marketing and signage as required;

AND FURTHER THAT Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) be notified of the name change as it relates to the Line 1 (Yonge-University) Pioneer Village Subway

Station.

BACKGROUND

Established in 1960 through a partnership between TRCA, City of Toronto, local municipalities and the Government of Ontario, Black Creek Pioneer Village is one of Ontario's leading living history museums, boasting over forty (40) heritage buildings of local, provincial, and national significance, and caring for 50,000 artifacts of material culture.

Black Creek Pioneer Village typically hosts 140,000 visitors annually, drawing from diverse communities within the GTA and beyond, including 44,000 students participating in school visits, 1,000 New Canadians through the Cultural Access Pass program, and 4,400 people from Toronto and Vaughan through access programs offered at neighborhood improvement area public libraries.

As one of the key tourism attractions in the north-west portion of the City of Toronto, Black Creek Pioneer Village is located within the York University Heights Neighborhood Improvement Area and directly adjacent to the Black Creek Neighborhood Improvement Area. More than 80% of residents in the Black Creek Neighbourhood Improvement Area and 69% of residents in the York University Heights Neighbourhood Improvement Area identify as a visible minority.

When Black Creek Pioneer Village was initially established, the focus of the museum was the preservation of the architecture, artifacts, and way-of-life of a particular period of settlement, in particular European settlement, in the GTA. This was intended to evoke and memorialize a romanticized vision of the "pioneer period" in Ontario through a curated environment and experience with a Eurocentric lens, to the exclusion, at the time, of other marginalized populations and global communities, including those from African, Asian or Eastern-European regions of the world, Central or South America, or those of different religions that had settled in Toronto and the surrounding area. Most glaringly, however, was the exclusion of indigenous peoples and perspectives in the narrative of Black Creek Pioneer Village as a portrayal of that specific time and place in our province and nation's history, particularly given the profound and significant impact that colonization and settlement in the area of what is now the GTA had on indigenous populations.

Since the establishment of Black Creek Pioneer Village, scholarly and public awareness of the complex role that story-telling and history-keeping plays in our communities has continued to evolve. We now understand that not only does Black Creek Pioneer Village not reflect an accurate depiction of the mid-Victorian era in Ontario at the time, but by continuing to portray that period through a romanticized lens, with an emphasis on the Eurocentric "Pioneer" experience including in the name of museum, that TRCA continues to perpetuate historic injustices against marginalized and diverse peoples.

To this end, recognizing the historic scope of the museum and collection at Black Creek Pioneer Village, efforts have commenced to expand programming and storytelling and integrate diverse perspectives into the buildings and exhibits of the museum, particularly

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those of indigenous peoples, to achieve a more inclusive and holistic approach to community-led history-keeping and interpretation.

In 2021 TRCA successfully integrated a temporary large-scale art project by Metis encaustic sculptor, Tracey-Mae Chambers, into the “pioneer village” setting. Chambers wove red string through the 19th century schoolhouse located at Black Creek Pioneer Village making a powerful statement on the legacy of residential schools and global unrest while asking visitors to consider how our society can remain hopeful. Chambers returned with a new installation in 2022 in the First House titled Hope and Healing, that focused on the impacts of colonization and illustrated connections between indigenous, Metis and Inuit peoples and Canadians in decolonizing public spaces.

The art of Tracey-Mae Chambers built on work underway since 2017 at Black Creek Pioneer Village to create *Changing the Narrative: Connecting Indigenous and Settler Histories at Black Creek Pioneer Village*, a permanent Indigenous History Gallery, through a partnership with York University (including Anishinaabe scholar and historian Dr. Alan Corbiere) and Jumblies Theatre (a project led by Haudenosaunee artist, Ange Loft) and guided by local First Nations representatives. Known as the Changing the Narrative partnership, this will result in a permanent exhibit at Black Creek Pioneer Village, original historical scholarship, and a weaving of Indigenous perspectives, content, and voices through existing interpretation of the Toronto Region in the 19th century. Participating First Nations include: Mississaugas of the Credit, Six Nations of the Grand River, Mississaugas of Scugog Island, Chippewas of Georgina Island, and Chippewas of Rama.

Recognizing that not only does the story of the GTA pre-date colonization, it also continues to this day, a renewed emphasis on inclusive story-telling that spans the history of the region has also underpinned exhibit and program development over the last decade at Black Creek Pioneer Village. In 2012 the first in a series of new exhibits that tells the story of settlement in the GTA through the lens of recent immigrants was unveiled *'They gave up themselves for the next generation': The Working Lives of Chinese Canadian Women, 1923-1967*. This was followed up by *Breaking the Silence: Stories of the British Home Children 1869-1948*, an exhibit in the McNair Gallery and a new and innovative exhibit in the Flynn House in 2021 that traces the journey of a refugee dual-faith family emigrating from Ireland to Toronto in the mid-19th century.

RATIONALE

Black Creek Pioneer Village and TRCA, with extensive heritage and cultural assets and infrastructure, along with a strong history of innovative programming, has an established reputation and name brand awareness. With that said, public perception of heritage villages such as Black Creek Pioneer Village has continued to evolve whereby public programming expectations tend to focus on a broader interest in experiences that provide a more fun and engaging experience within a heritage context, more so than traditional interpretive heritage museum experiences or tours.

At TRCA, awareness, understanding and sensitivity to the use of “pioneer” in the name of Black Creek Pioneer Village dates back to the 1990s, including a September 16,

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1994, staff report to the Black Creek Pioneer Village Sub-Committee of TRCA's Board of Directors which recommended updating the name to Black Creek Heritage Village. The recommendation was referred back to staff for further analysis, however, ongoing discussions and consideration regarding the name of Black Creek Pioneer Village continued including a growing awareness more recently, as noted above, of the complex relationship between colonial institutions such as living history museums and indigenous communities.

We have heard from our discussions with indigenous community representatives and stakeholders that the word "pioneer" presents a significant barrier to inclusion and participation for both indigenous communities and new Canadians by focusing on a specific period in time in Canadian and local history that did not and does not reflect the rich cultural heritage of local communities from pre-contact to the current period. In particular, from an Indigenous perspective, scholars and researchers from York University and representatives from Mississaugas of the Credit, Six Nations of the Grand River, Mississaugas of Scugog Island, Chippewas of Georgina Island, and Chippewas of Rama, through the Changing the Narrative partnership, identified the word "pioneer" in the name of Black Creek Pioneer Village as a particular barrier to participation in further scholarly and interpretive collaboration related to the Indigenous History Gallery and, as such, support the new proposed name The Village at Black Creek.

To this end it is recommended that TRCA rename Black Creek Pioneer Village as The Village at Black Creek. This achieves several goals:

1. It removes Pioneer from the name, thereby taking an additional step towards improved relationship-building and reconciliation with indigenous communities;
2. It maintains a geographic connection to both the Black Creek tributary of the Humber River, as well as the local community within which the museum is located; and
3. It leverages the idea of The Village, which Black Creek Pioneer Village is already colloquially known as internally to TRCA staff and provides a social and cultural touch-point for branding purposes in that everyone, in some form, can connect with the idea of a village.

Villages globally are a common unifier. They represent a collection of people and places and are both ancient and modern, and in many respects, timeless. In both the rural context and the urban context, around the world and throughout time, villages represent community and the coming together of people and ideas. In cultural terms villages are in many ways ubiquitous in how we imagine or see ourselves. From the African proverb of "it takes a village to raise a child" to Marshall McLuhan's assertion that "the new electronic independence re-creates the world in the image of a global village", it can be said that all people are either part of a village, or at the very least connected to a village in some form or fashion.

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Renaming TRCA's museum as "The Village at Black Creek" leverages this idea of a village, both big and small, and draws on people's relationships with their own villages; it acts as a unifier that spans time, thereby allowing for expanded and inclusive storytelling, exhibit development and community engagement.

Relationship to TRCA's 2022-2034 Strategic Plan

This report supports the following Pillar(s) and Outcome(s) set forth in TRCA's 2023-2034 Strategic Plan:

Pillar 3 Community Prosperity:

3.2 A culture of diversity, equity and inclusion contributing to community well-being

Pillar 3 Community Prosperity:

3.3 Informed citizens are conservation champions

Pillar 4 Service Excellence:

4.3 Responsive relationships and a trusted brand with a reputation for excellence

Pillar 4 Service Excellence:

4.4 Transparent decision making and accountable results

FINANCIAL DETAILS

Renaming and rebranding to The Village at Black Creek, including updating of signage throughout and on museum buildings, website and other promotional campaigns and materials will be staged with priority given to updating main entrance and road signage as well as the website. Initial costs are anticipated to be approximately \$45,000 for the first phase. Subsequent updating of program and promotional materials, wayfinding and other ancillary consumables will be replaced as current supplies are depleted or need replacing.

Expanded programming to realize the renewed vision for The Village at Black Creek, inclusive of indigenous and multicultural perspectives, is currently unfunded. While grants and other one-time funding sources exist and are secured as appropriate and available, stable long-term operating support is required to fully realize the potential of The Village as a catalyst for economic development and storytelling in this area of the City of Toronto. A detailed report outlining current budget requirements is being prepared in parallel to this report in consultation with City of Toronto staff, neighbouring municipalities and government stakeholders and will be provided to the Board of Directors and government partners to inform their 2024 budget processes.

DETAILS OF WORK TO BE DONE

Staff will convene a working group of key internal and external stakeholders to inform development of The Village at Black Creek brand.

Staff are preparing a report to TRCA's Board of Directors on guidelines related to an updated TRCA Public Assets and Facilities Naming Policy. It is anticipated that The Village at Black Creek will be compliant with any updated policy as it advances inclusion and reconciliation by de-colonializing the official name of the museum.

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Staff will reach out to the TTC, neighbours including York University, Tennis Canada and networks including relevant provincial and federal agencies and ministries to inform them of the name change if approved by the Board of Directors.

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