Indigenous Planning in Downtown Toronto

by

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Abstract

The Sacred Fire recently established in Allan Gardens in downtown Toronto is a compelling example of Indigenous self-determination and jurisdiction. Western planning continues to regard urban Indigenous peoples merely as stakeholders, resulting in decisions being made on their behalf. This paper examines how acts of refusal, mainly through Sacred Fires, in Toronto's Garden District have contributed to Indigenous resurgence at Allan Gardens by prompting amendments to existing bylaws that recognize Land-based practices. The Sacred Fire site was established through the actions of urban Indigenous peoples in response to the City of Toronto's planning practices, which do not incorporate Indigenous relationships with the Land. Furthermore, the Sacred Fire exemplifies an Indigenous thirdspace, offering an opportunity to advance resurgence in urban areas. Additionally, through this research, I argue that planners must demonstrate cultural competency to sustain collaborative relationships and better address Indigenous needs. The perception that Indigenous peoples predominantly live on reserves has led to policies that retroactively acknowledge the various ways in which Indigenous connections to the Land manifest in downtown Toronto. Through fieldwork and relationship-building, I have learned how Indigenous sovereignty shapes the production of Indigenous space and place in downtown Toronto. The concepts of heterotopia and thirdspace help elucidate how Western planning frames the Sacred Fire and the societal values that shape belonging.

Keywords: Indigenous planning, resurgence, Indigenous urbanism, Thirdspace

Foreword

This paper aligns with three main components outlined in my Plan of Study. The components and relevant learning objectives that I met through the completion of this Major Paper are outlined below:

Component 1 Indigeneity and Urbanism: Through this Major Paper, I learned how colonialism defines Indigeneity as an identity and how it relates to urban Indigenous peoples' production of space, including actions such as creating areas for food sovereignty in the built environment. I reviewed scholarship by a range of Indigenous scholars on Indigenous urbanism to examine the relationship between Indigeneity and planning, and to consider how Indigenous urbanism can function as an analytical framework for transforming settler-colonial approaches to urban planning.

Component 2 Environmental Planning: Through my internship at AtkinsRealis (an engineering firm) and the completion of this Major Paper, as well as other coursework, I have gained the knowledge and skills necessary to meet the CIP and OPPI program requirements for candidate membership. I have a deeper understanding of how planning policies and initiatives have constructed the exclusion of Indigenous peoples in planning and are now transitioning in an attempt to address this issue. Furthermore, I have learned to consult with Indigenous peoples in a meaningful way, based on their needs and sovereignty in Ontario, with a focus on relationality and reciprocity.

Component 3 Indigenous Planning: I further developed my working knowledge of Indigenous planning through my connection to Indigeneity and by participating in cultural events at Allan Gardens and throughout the city that focus on revitalizing Indigenous practices. Through this Major Paper, I have gained a deeper understanding of what urban Indigenous peoples require from municipalities to support cultural continuity. I have also developed a working knowledge of how different ways of knowing can enable planning to take a more holistic approach.

Table of Contents

Abstract i

Foreword ii

Table of Contents iii

List of Figures v

Acknowledgements vi

1.0 Introduction 2

1.1 Section Breakdown 4

1.2 Allan Gardens Site Context 5

1.3 Historical and Contemporary Context 8

1.4 Allan Gardens Present and Future Changes 9

2.0 Conceptual Framework 12

2.1 Indigenous Planning 12

2.2 Indigenous Resurgence 14

2.3 Indigenous Urbanism 16

2.3.1 Placemaking 18

2.3.2 Indigenous Food Sovereignty 18

2.3.3 Heterotopias and Thirdspaces 19

3.0 Policy Review 21

3.1 Legislative and Policy Framework 21

3.2 Federal Policy and Legal Frameworks 23

3.2.1 Indigenous Spirituality 24

3.2.2 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples 24

3.2.3 Truth and Reconciliation Report Calls to Action 25

3.3 Provincial Planning Policies 26

3.3.1 Canadian Institute of Planners and the Ontario Professional Planners Institute 28

3.3.2 Ontario's Urban Indigenous Action Plan 29

3.3.3 OPPI's Indigenous Perspectives in Planning Report 29

3.4 City of Toronto Policies 31

4.0 Indigenous Research Methodologies 37

4.1 Land and Place 38

5.0 Methodology 40

5.1 Research Questions and Justifications 41

5.1.1 Research Question 1: How do Indigenous people already do planning?..... 41

5.1.2 Research Question 2: How did the Sacred Fire at Allan Gardens become legitimized by City planning? 41

5.1.3 Research Question 3: How is Toronto City planning incorporating Indigenous planning? 41

5.2 Methods..... 42

5.3 Research Ethics 43

5.3.1 Analysis..... 45

5.3.2 Indigenous Data Sovereignty 45

6.0 Findings and Discussion 45

6.1 Theme 1: Land relationships and Thirdspaces..... 47

6.2 Theme 2: Transitory Nature of Allan Gardens Through Physical Design Elements 50

6.3 Theme 3: Heterotopia 51

6.4 Theme 4: Going Beyond Placemaking 52

6.5 Theme 5: Moving Towards a Different Governance Framework 53

6.6 Theme 6: Contentions and Frictions 56

7.0 Conclusion 56

References 59

Appendix A – Interview Questions and Demographic Questions 64

Appendix B – Excerpts from the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Articles 66

Appendix C – Excerpts from the *Provincial Planning Statement* Policies 69

Appendix D – Excerpts from the City of Toronto Official Plan 71

Appendix E – Excerpts from the Downtown Plan 73

Appendix F – Excerpts from the Downtown Parks and Public Realm Plan 76

Appendix G – Excerpts from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action 77

List of Figures

Figure 1 Map of Allan Gardens with Sacred Fire, and red squares denoting medicine gardens (Friends of Allan Gardens, 2026) 6

Figure 2 Garden District plan boundaries (Toronto, 2021, p. 32) 7

Figure 3 Allan Gardens looking south from Carlton Street with a view of the Sacred Fire (Google Earth, 2023) 7

Figure 4 Proposed themed greenhouses (Friends of Allan Gardens, 2023). 10

Figure 5 Revitalized dog off-leash area (Friends of Allan Gardens, 2023) 10

Figure 6 Proposed redesign north of the Children's Conservatory (Friends of Allan Gardens, 2023) 10

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AI was not used in the writing of this Major Paper at any stage of the research process.

1.0 Introduction

This research paper examines how urban Indigenous peoples plan in downtown Toronto, how the City of Toronto (City) has developed policies to advance reconciliation, and how planners incorporate Indigenous principles into their practise. It also addresses questions I have long asked about Indigenous planning but have never received satisfactory answers to, if I received answers at all. I am Tzotzil and Raramuri from Chiapas, Mexico, and my family moved to Canada in 1994 because of state violence against Indigenous peoples by the Mexican government. In my youth, I asked why Indigenous peoples had to go outside the city to hold open-air ceremonies, and, whenever ceremonies were held at home in the city, I asked why they were held indoors. No one could provide a satisfactory answer. Initially, I planned for my major research paper to examine Indigenous food sovereignty in the City through a planning lens. I later shifted my focus to how Indigenous peoples continue to engage in planning in urban areas where their histories and cultures are absent from the built environment. My research focuses on the Sacred Fire established at Allan Gardens on October 4, 2022 (Costa, 2022; Urban Squares, 2024) as a recent example of how Indigenous peoples have confronted urban planning. The Sacred Fire is an important expression of Indigenous spirituality and connection to the Land (Toronto, 2022c; Toronto Times, 2022).

The Sacred Fire emerged as an act of resistance in response to the City's failure to acknowledge and incorporate the planning principles of urban Indigenous peoples. This failure reflects Western planning approaches centred on property, which do not recognize that Indigenous worldviews understand Land as living and possessing agency (Watts, 2013). Now, as a result of my experiences throughout my graduate program, I believe planners must work with urban Indigenous peoples to ensure their active participation in the planning process rather than making decisions on their behalf. Current planning policies are inadequate because they treat urban Indigenous peoples as just another stakeholder group affected by planning, acknowledging Indigenous presence in Toronto without requiring their worldviews to shape planning policies and practices. Moreover, by failing to plan with urban Indigenous peoples, the City faces acts of resistance, such as those at Allan Gardens.

The questions that motivated my studies are explored in this Major Paper, which focuses on how contemporary planning affects urban Indigenous peoples. I have sought to understand how

urban Indigenous peoples practise their culture in urban spaces, such as downtown Toronto, and how planning practices and processes can address historical and contemporary barriers. As I learned more about the planning profession over the past several years as a planning student, I wanted to understand how contemporary urban Indigenous peoples can plan in urban spaces that have been built, shaped, and designed through Western planning practices and processes. These questions led me to develop a conceptual framework, as outlined in Section 3.0 (pp. 11 - 20), with the help of several scholars (Sarah Rotz, Laura Taylor, J.P. Catungal, Vivian Jimenez Estrada, Lisa Myers, and Fernanda Yanchapaxi), through whom I learned about Indigenous resurgence, urbanism, and planning.

Before starting this Master's program and research project, I began volunteering with the Friends of Allan Gardens (FOAG) in May 2023 and continue to do so. I have built relationships with both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples at Allan Gardens for approximately three years. I did not intend to pursue a Master's and focus my research at Allan Gardens; however, I realized that the relationships I built while volunteering at various Indigenous cultural events have expanded my understanding of urban Indigenous life from both personal and academic perspectives. The relationships I developed at Allan Gardens reminded me that, as Indigenous peoples, we are not represented in either urban physicality or imaginaries, which has led me to ask what must change within the City of Toronto (and other cities) to move beyond land acknowledgements and towards creating Indigenous futures.

The purpose of my research is not only to understand how urban Indigenous peoples plan downtown areas, but also to examine how city planning and governance can evolve to recognize Indigenous peoples' inherent rights to plan for their own needs and communities.

My research questions are as follows:

1. How do Indigenous peoples already do planning?
2. How did the Sacred Fire at Allan Gardens become legitimized by City planning?
3. How is Toronto City planning incorporating Indigenous planning?
    a. What are planners doing now, such as practising the duty to consult, to incorporate Indigenous planning in urban areas?

b. What does that look like in the Garden District?

c. At a micro level, how has the TOCore Plan incorporated Indigenous planning? Has it moved beyond land acknowledgements, social services, and other undue burdens—for example, requiring Indigenous peoples to pressure the City to address disproportionately high rates of homelessness?

In my paper, I explore these questions through a literature and policy review and through interviews with participants who live in, work in, or otherwise engage with the Garden District.

1.1 Section Breakdown

In the rest of the Introduction section below (pp. 5-11), I outline the historical and contemporary context of my research site, Allan Gardens, in Toronto's Garden District. I focus on the creation of the Allan Gardens Conservatory and park, and on the planning documents that have shaped the area's design and growth. I then discuss the site's contemporary context, including the creation of the Sacred Fire site and its importance to urban Indigenous peoples as a place of gathering.

In sections 2.0 Conceptual Framework (pp. 11-21) and 3.0 Policy Review (pp. 21-36), I conduct a literature and policy review of Indigenous urbanism, resurgence, and planning in downtown Toronto. Through desktop research, I examine relevant planning policies and practices, drawing on grey literature, peer-reviewed journals, and contemporary planning documents that shape the area's present and future growth. In the review, I discuss Indigenous research methodologies (section 4.0, pp. 37-41) that have shaped my understanding of an Indigenous research paradigm, as well as the concepts of thirdspace and heterotopia, which I use to understand the Allan Gardens Conservatory and park.

Third, section 5.0 Methodology (pp. 40-45) outlines the methods I used to conduct qualitative analysis for this research project, the steps I took to build relationships with urban Indigenous peoples, and how I ultimately selected whom to interview. I also discuss my research questions and justifications, and the ethical approach I took to complete this Major Research Paper.

Lastly, I present my findings and discuss (see section 6.0, pp. 45-56), the importance of the Sacred Fire at Allan Gardens as an expression of self-determination and sovereignty for urban

Indigenous peoples. I argue that the Sacred Fire is an Indigenous thirdspace that not only fulfills a need for urban Indigenous peoples in Toronto as a cultural site but, as an act of refusal, also demonstrates how resurgence can take place in an urban setting.

In conclusion (see section 7.0, pp. 56-57), I discuss the importance of Indigenous cultural competency for current and future planners in the City of Toronto as a requirement for working on Indigenous Land, and how understanding that urban Indigenous peoples' approach planning in urban areas is an expression of their inherent rights as peoples who have maintained reciprocal relationships with the Land since time immemorial.

1.2 Allan Gardens Site Context

The City of Toronto notes that Indigenous peoples established villages in river valleys and along the shores of large meltwater lakes, including what is now known as Lake Ontario (Toronto, 2021). Colonial surveyors laid out a grid framework in the late 18th century, destroying various Indigenous cultural features of the landscape (Toronto, 2018). Indigenous peoples historically travelled the routes they had established over generations (Freeman & Freeman, 2025). However, settler-colonialism has shaped how Indigenous peoples have built relationships with the Land (Dorries, 2023; Barry & Thompson-Fawcett, 2020; Barry & Turriff, 2020; Simpson, 2017).

The Garden District is the urban planning label for an area in what is now east downtown Toronto that includes Allan Gardens, a site where many urban Indigenous peoples live and interact with the Land (Figure 1). Allan Gardens is a gathering site for various people, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, and today a space where Indigenous peoples' cultural practices, including keeping a Sacred Fire, spiritual expression, and earthwork, take place. There is also a history of unhoused people residing in the park, followed by state-sanctioned violence against these two overlapping demographics: unhoused people and urban Indigenous communities (Manucdoc & Draaisma, 2024).

Various Sacred Fires have been held at Allan Gardens before the current one was accepted by the City; however, I was not able to confirm exact dates relating to this contemporary time when the first fire was lit. However, following engagement with Indigenous community members and leaders, who identified the need for these sites, Toronto City Council approved amendments to the City by-laws establishing a new fee classification for cultural fires, including Sacred Fires

(Toronto, 2022c). Toronto Fire Services (TFS), in consultation with the Indigenous Affairs Office (IAO) and Indigenous communities, brought a Report for Action forward that recognizes the importance of Sacred Fires as a sacred gift from the Creator; a means of communicating with the Spirit World, ancestors, and Creation; and for wellness, healing, and gatherings (Toronto, 2022c).

Allan Gardens has become a place where many activities overlap, including Indigenous practises alongside common park uses (walking, cycling, use of amenities, etc.). Some view the Gardens as containing "hostile design elements," seeing them as spaces people navigate or travel through to reach their destinations rather than as places to dwell in and find meaning. I use the concept of thirdspace (discussed in detail in sections 2.3.3, 6.1., and 6.3) to describe such a landscape that is both materially and spiritually meaningful. Lastly, a connection to the Land through cultural sites like a Sacred Fire and the Medicine Gardens is important for urban Indigenous peoples to foster belonging and cultural continuity. Allan Gardens is an example of a way forward for urban Indigenous peoples to have a say in how urban areas can be used.

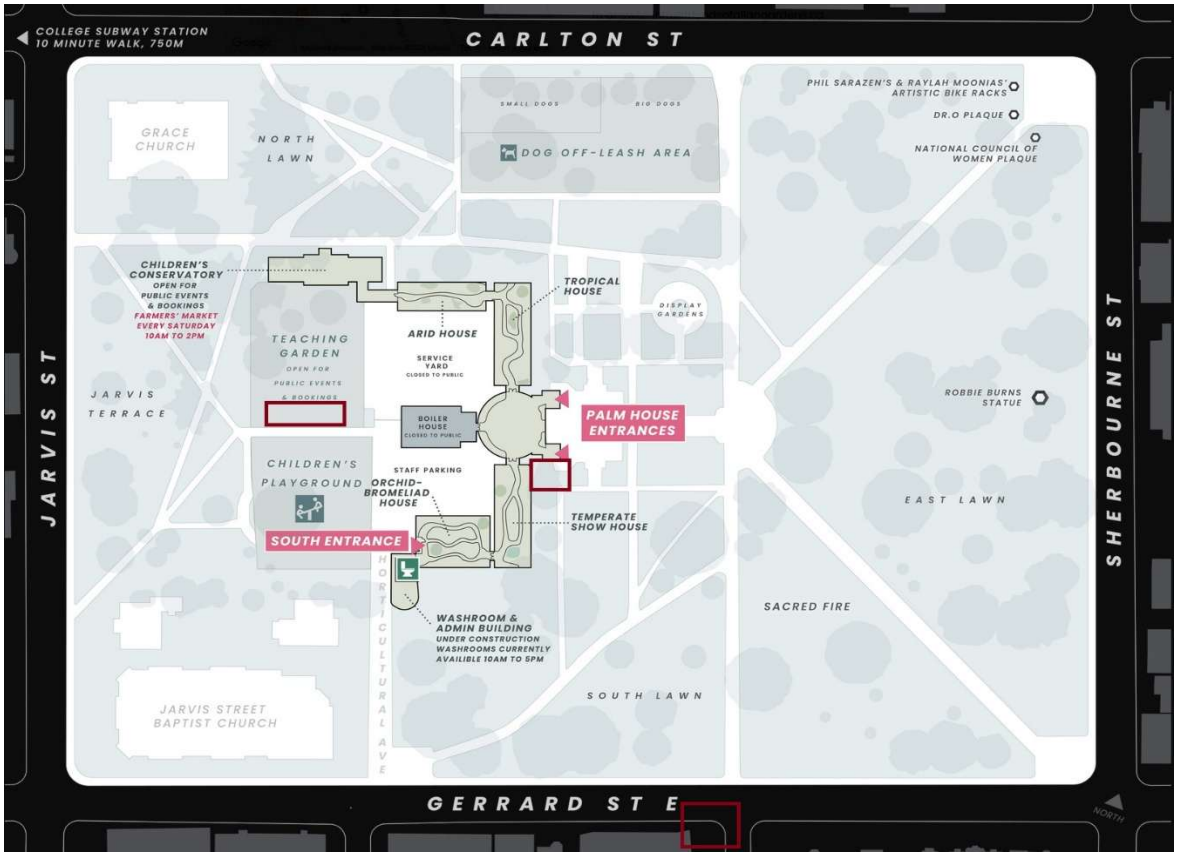


Figure 1 Map of Allan Gardens with Sacred Fire, and red squares denoting medicine gardens (Friends of Allan Gadens, 2026)



Figure 2 Garden District plan boundaries (Toronto, 2021, p. 32)



Figure 3 Allan Gardens looking south from Carlton Street with a view of the Sacred Fire (Google Earth, 2023)

1.3 Historical and Contemporary Context

Allan Gardens Park and Conservatory is today in the City of Toronto's downtown, bounded to the south by Gerrard Street, to the east by Sherbourne Street, to the west by Jarvis Street, and to the north by Carlton Street. The park is within the Garden District, which the City has defined with Carlton Street East to the north, Sherbourne Street to the east, Queen Street East to the south, and George Street to the west (Figure 2).

This area has been culturally significant to the Indigenous peoples of the Great Lakes region since time immemorial (Freeman, 2025). Toronto is the traditional territory of the Anishinaabe, the Haudenosaunee, and the Huron-Wendat, and the Garden District has become a sacred gathering place for Indigenous peoples from across Turtle Island (Freeman, 2025; Friends of Allan Gardens, 2023). On October 4, 2022, the City's Indigenous Affairs Office announced three designated locations for its new Sacred Fires programs, including the southwestern corner of Allan Gardens (Friends of Allan Gardens, 2023; Toronto, 2022b).

The other Sacred Fire sites are at Christie Pits Park in the west end and Norwood Park in the Beaches neighbourhood of Toronto in the east end. The Sacred Fire has been burning daily since November 2022 in remembrance of the children taken from their families during the Sixties and Millennium Scoops (see Canada, 2015). The Sacred Fire was given the name Mishkiki Abinoonjiinh Skode, which means Medicine Children's Fire, in Anishinaabemowin (Friends of Allan Gardens, 2023).

Allan Gardens was established in the 1860s as a Victorian horticultural garden, covering 6.1 hectares, including 4 hectares of pervious surface (growing medium) (Millward & Sabir, 2011). The Allan Gardens Conservatory and park were donated to the Horticultural Society of Toronto in 1968 (Toronto, 2017c). After a fire in 1902, the conservatory was expanded with a new palm house in 1910; in 1920 and 1957, it was further expanded with four show house wings (Toronto, 2021). The newest structure, the Children's Conservatory, was donated by the University of Toronto in 2004 and is now used for programming by FOAG (Friends of Allan Gardens, 2017, 2023; Toronto, 2017d). FOAG facilitates Indigenous cultural programming in the Garden District, in collaboration with Indigenous organizations (Taiaiako'n Historical Preservation Society, Native Women's Resource Centre, Medicine Children's Fire, Miziwe Biik, and Toronto and York Region Métis

Council), through the maintenance of four Medicine Gardens and various cultural events (Friends of Allan Gardens, 2023). Additionally, the City in 2021 designated the Garden District as a heritage conservation district under Part IV of the *Ontario Heritage Act* (Toronto, 2021), with policies that guide the district's current and future growth. Surprisingly, the heritage conservation district status does not prioritize or acknowledge Indigenous cultural heritage landscapes within the Garden District. It also reflects the City's lack of collaboration with urban Indigenous peoples and their histories.

1.4 Allan Gardens Present and Future Changes

In this section, I discuss the present and future of the Allan Gardens Conservatory, including the proposed greenhouse expansion and park redesign. My account of the present draws on interviews and my own experiences volunteering in the greenhouses as a docent, where I engage visitors by sharing horticultural knowledge and supporting events hosted by the Friends of Allan Gardens. Several planning documents discussed in section 2.1, Legislative and Policy Framework, broadly inform the future of the Allan Gardens greenhouse and adjacent greenspace. I discuss the plans for the greenhouses and surrounding parkland as envisioned by the FOAG, who were supported by the City of Toronto's Parks and Recreation and the office of City Councillor Chris Moise.

The proposed expansion of the Allan Gardens Conservatory not only modifies the existing greenhouses but also includes redesigning the dog park north of the Children's Conservatory and the area east of Grace Toronto Church (Figures 3, 4, and 5). FOAG aims to transition the year-round farmers market to align with the proposed pathway design changes. As of summer 2026, FOAG has expanded the farmers market to the north side of the Children's Conservatory, consistent with their planning policies, which align with CoreTO policies to create a link between Allan Gardens and Moss Park via Pembroke Ave (Figure 1). The proposed changes involve significant modifications to the surrounding landscape, including redesigning park pathways and expanding the conservatory. The conservatory is a colonial legacy that reflects a Eurocentric approach to how society interacts with and values the natural environment.

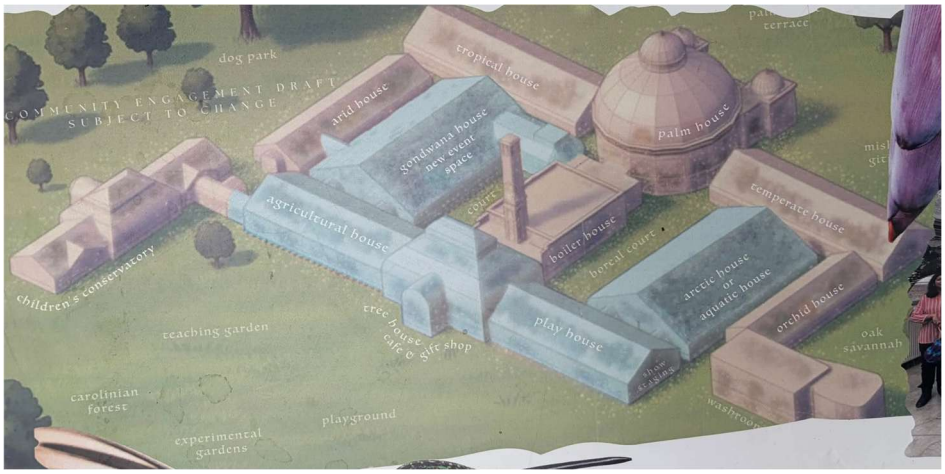


Figure 4 Proposed themed greenhouses (Friends of Allan Gardens, 2023).



Figure 5 Revitalized dog off-leash area (Friends of Allan Gardens, 2023)



Figure 6 Proposed redesign north of the Children's Conservatory (Friends of Allan Gardens, 2023)

The proposed expansion, in my opinion, does not meaningfully advance Truth and Reconciliation because conservatories are colonial legacies in which the City and a non-Indigenous organization restrict and control access to plants (which can be used as Indigenous medicines, not just species of botanical interest). The expansion includes three greenhouses: Gondwana (a supercontinent before Pangea), featuring plants that have undergone convergent evolution; a food-production greenhouse centred on culturally relevant foods grown year-round; and an Arctic and Great Lakes-themed greenhouse focusing on plants culturally relevant to Indigenous peoples. The planning documents from FOAG do not specify how Indigenous peoples will be involved in, or have been involved in, the design and proposal of the greenhouse link buildings even though they state that the link buildings will exemplify (Friends of Allan Gardens, 2023, p. 45) "First Nations cultural presence on the Allan Gardens site". Currently, FOAG is propagating Suputi/Pualunnguat/Arctic cotton (*Eriophorum callitrix*) from seeds shared by a local Inuit organization, with the understanding that the organization will have access to the plants when they mature, but I wonder how the Inuit community will access the future greenhouse for cultural practises that may require Arctic cotton. The City and FOAG must develop a plan to ensure FNMI practices are not subject to continual gatekeeping and control by non-Indigenous organizations.

City Council voted in favour of the expansion and allocated $1 million to it, with the understanding that the space will continue to be used in partnership with FOAG. Through my interviews, I have learned that FOAG has the support of the urban Indigenous peoples at the Sacred Fire. However, I am reminded that information is sometimes withheld or altered to advance developments that affect Indigenous nations and peoples and to secure their support. That support is limited to the urban Indigenous peoples at the Sacred Fire. Other urban Indigenous organizations and peoples may not express support for the expansion. If the City and FOAG truly want to work towards implementing the Calls to Action and Truth and Reconciliation to improve relationships with urban Indigenous peoples, a different system of operation needs to be in place. Nonetheless, the acceptance of the Sacred Fire is an important step in the City's recognition of the importance of involving urban Indigenous peoples in planning.

2.0 Conceptual Framework

In this section, I discuss the literature that I have drawn upon to create my conceptual framework as part of my literature and policy review. Specifically, the conceptual framework I developed to understand how planning has shaped Allan Gardens from a more Indigenous perspective is grounded in Indigenous planning, urbanism, and resurgence. These concepts are represented to varying degrees in Allan Gardens' built and natural environments, including the Sacred Fire site, the gardens, the people who live in the park, and the future uses of the site planned by both urban Indigenous peoples and the City of Toronto. Indigenous knowledge is rooted in spiritual health, culture, and language (Smith, 2022), which is transmitted across generations. The principles and practices that come from Indigenous knowledge systems have manifested at Allan Gardens in various ways; however, I focus on the Sacred Fire because of how the space began as an act of refusal to fulfil a need that the City of Toronto was not acknowledging and actively planning based on how urban Indigenous people connect with the Land.

2.1 Indigenous Planning

Until relatively recently, Indigenous voices have been subsumed (or ignored) by non-native practitioners who have used approaches to community development that are attuned to urban mainstream environments (Jojola, 2008). This dynamic has been evident throughout much of the history of contact with non-tribal peoples. Paternalistic governmental and missionary approaches repressed the ability of Indigenous peoples to develop the local capacity to assume their own governance. Instead, this approach (Jojola, 2008, p. 41) "created dependency and promoted practices intended to assimilate tribes into mainstream life". Despite numerous national reports describing the living and economic conditions of Indigenous peoples, very little progress had been made.

According to Porter et al. (2017) there is a growing momentum in planning research, education, and practice toward the commitment of these fields to make a more just and respectful relationship with Indigenous peoples. Part of this commitment includes collective efforts towards defining and understanding the concepts and practices of Indigenous planning, recognizing distinctive practices of planning that derive from an (Jojola, 2008, p. 42) "Indigenous worldview,

which not only serves to unite [Indigenous planning] philosophically, but also to distinguish it from neighbouring non-land-based communities". 'Indigenous planning' can be understood as an attempt to 'name the word name the world' (Freire, 2018; Porter et al., 2017, p. 640); to create a theoretical and practical space for Indigenous peoples and communities to do 'their' planning 'in' planning. As no one can own planning, no one can own a word, as planning describes a universal human activity across the present and future. However, Matunga (Porter et al., 2017) explains that the word has been used to dominate, remove and hurt Indigenous communities onto reserves and into enclaves, even humanity. Allan Gardens, in my opinion, can be seen as an example of where planning has 'spatialized oppression' and violently zoned that oppression permanently into a contested landscape. The literature review synthesizes scholarship on Indigenous planning, resurgence, and urbanism.

Additionally, I expand on the conceptual framework I developed to examine how urban Indigenous peoples in Toronto have planned within the Garden District. My conceptual framework draws on Indigenous urbanism, resurgence, and planning to analyze my findings from the Allan Gardens Conservatory and the Sacred Fire and to develop a working understanding of how Indigenous peoples plan in urban settings. I then discuss the Indigenous research methodologies that have helped me understand an Indigenous research paradigm. I also examine how Indigenous peoples view and understand Land and place. By suggesting an Indigenous research paradigm, I am able to explain how Indigenous peoples, both broadly and in Ontario, understand Land and planning. I draw on Indigenous methodologies, which have informed my understanding of how to conduct research with Indigenous peoples ethically and respectfully. Furthermore, I discuss how Indigenous peoples' relationships with the Land differ from Western planning's view of land as property through the concepts of thirdspace (Johnson, 2008) and heterotopia (Johnson, 2006; Foucault, 2019) to examine how Western thought understands the production of space.

'Naming' Indigenous planning has become a way for Indigenous peoples to write themselves back into planning history, planning theory and planning practice, from which they have been historically excluded (Porter et al., 2017). Essentially, Indigenous planning is planning by and with (not for) Indigenous peoples, using or at least being aware of their processes to achieve their defined outcomes. It is about a process that drives towards a set of desired outcomes. Indigenous planning as a process can be articulated through the people-place-knowledge-values-

loop (Porter et al., 2017). And therefore, defined broadly, as Simpson (Klein, 2013, npn) states, "[our] ancestors tended to look very far into the future in terms of planning, look[ing] seven generations forward" and seven generations back. Additionally, Porter et al. write about Indigenous planning as (2017, p. 642) "Indigenous people making decisions about their place (whether in the built or natural environment) using their knowledge (and other knowledges), values and principles to define and progress their present and future social, cultural, environmental and economic aspirations". Allan Gardens is an example of Indigenous planning because urban Indigenous peoples chose to fulfill a need within their respective communities in the form of a Sacred Fire ceremony, which the City was not recognizing and addressing through planning.

2.2 Indigenous Resurgence

Indigenous resurgence is a form of decolonization and resistance through reconnecting with land, culture and community, and rejuvenating Indigenous nationhood, governance structures and economies (Simpson, 2017). Additionally, resurgence is demonstrated as an increase in opportunities to live Indigenously in contemporary times, and can be facilitated through genuine progress made towards transforming the colonial status quo through consultation and implementation by the City of Toronto (Elliott, 2018). I see the Sacred Fire as an example of resurgence because of the reclamation of space, through an act of refusal, that the City has designated as parkland (Toronto, 2018). This concept has emerged as a political and intellectual movement in recent years (T. Alfred & Corntassel, 2005; Corntassel, 2012; Klein, 2013; Simpson, 2017).

Indigenous resurgence captures the idea of operating outside colonial-settler frameworks. Elliot (2018, p. 61) writes that "Indigenous resurgence centres on three contentions: (1) That colonialism is an active structure of domination premised, at base, on Indigenous elimination; (2) That the prevailing normative-discursive environment continues to reflect this imperative; and (3) that Indigenous peoples must therefore turn away from this hostile environment and pursue independent programmes of social and cultural rejuvenation." Proponents of resurgence whose continued attempts to resist and transform the settler-colonial order from within cannot genuinely move towards decolonization because working towards modifying the conditions of colonialism

is still colonialism. In the case of the Sacred Fire at Allan Gardens, Indigenous residents set out to establish their own Indigenous cultural centre and space and did not first seek approval from the City of Toronto. Horn (2022) states that creating advisory committees can provide opportunities for urban Indigenous peoples to exercise their voice and become entrenched in existing political networks. However, I argue that the Sacred Fire did not need to operate within settler-colonial frameworks to become established, and that acts of resistance and refusal by various urban Indigenous peoples in Toronto led to the adoption of a pilot programme (Urban Squares, 2024; Costa, 2022; OSKYA, 2022; Toronto, 2022b) that established three Sacred Fires within the city.

Projects that aim to help Indigenous communities have mostly been developed by non-Indigenous peoples and governance structures, which do not allow Indigenous peoples to move beyond being considered stakeholders and towards having decision-making power. Simpson (2017) argues that turning away from state-centred projects and towards resurgence within Indigenous communities is a key part of enacting decolonization. While other scholars argue that reconciliation and resurgence do not need to be mutually exclusive, resurgence can be used by Indigenous peoples to develop (Asch, 2018, p. 5) "transformative" modes of reconciliation that fundamentally re-orient political and social relations between Indigenous peoples and Canada. As an example of Indigenous resurgence, I see Allan Gardens as a site of Indigenous self-determination and sovereignty through various acts of refusal and placemaking in partnership with organizations (like the Friends of Allan Gardens, Miziwe Biik, Native Women's Resource Centre, and Toronto & York Region Métis Council) and the City, which has taken shape in the form of medicine gardens and the Sacred Fire (Friends of Allan Gardens, 2017, 2023).

Engagement with settler society can be part of resurgence because the shift should be towards a dialogue on justice and decolonization that is structured by the principles of mutual recognition and reciprocity (Elliott, 2018). (See 5.0 Indigenous Research Methodologies section (pp. 37-40) for a discussion on what reciprocity means for Indigenous peoples). Resurgence can aim to have continued dialogue with settler society that works towards the renewal of relationships. Indigenous resurgence can also be understood through the Land Back movement that aims to reclaim Indigenous jurisdiction, which can be in the form of co-management of lands. The Sacred Fire at Allan Gardens is an example of a shared use of space that may not have originally been designated as such by the City of Toronto; however, through grassroots movements led by urban

Indigenous peoples, the City has recognized the importance of the space (Friends of Allan Gardens, 2017; Costa, 2022; Urban Squares, 2024).

The City of Toronto retroactively legitimized the Sacred Fire through a pilot programme (see section 6.0 Findings (pp. 46-56); however, I argue that the act of legitimizing a ceremony is another form of colonization, as Alfred (2009, p. 44) states that the sources of legitimacy are found within Canadian Laws, not in "First Nation interests or laws". The act of legitimacy serves the interests of the City of Toronto, and urban Indigenous interests were not a priority until the space at Allan Gardens was reclaimed through an act of refusal. Furthermore, the City of Toronto requires a notice (Toronto, 2017) from Indigenous peoples to have Sacred Fires in public spaces; however, waiting for approval/legitimation can be seen as an acceptance and support of colonial institutions (Alfred, 2009; Elliott, 2018), which benefits settler interests. Holding ceremony does not run on the same timeline as the City's approval process and may be held outside of City business hours. The Sacred Fire at Allan Gardens, as an act of refusal, a mode of resistance (Elliott, 2018), prevents the further erosion of Indigenous social and cultural being. As a space of resurgence, it is structured for the principle of reciprocity and sovereignty. An approach to resurgence is through binationalism/biculturalism, as Johnson (2008, p. 33) writes, "the bicultural and binational nature of the description of the two rows of wampum and its implicit critique of liberal multiculturalism leads to a discussion of one particular option that has gained an upper hand in discussions of cultural difference and indigenous self-determination"; as an alternative governance framework, it allows Indigenous peoples to have decision-making power over planning decisions that impact their communities. I discuss this further in section 6.5 (p. 53-56) below.

2.3 Indigenous Urbanism

The term *urbs nullius* can be used to describe ways in which urban space is understood devoid of Indigenous presence (Coulthard & Alfred, 2014, p. 176). As such a space, Allan Gardens has historically been inhabited by Indigenous peoples; however, through continual dispossession and displacement by settler-colonial policies and pogroms, a perception of Indigenous peoples not being urban was developed and assumed. I contest that Indigenous peoples have always had a presence downtown and, through acts of refusal, have established a Sacred Fire and cultural space

at Allan Gardens outside of the City's by-laws. Indigenous urbanism, as Dorries (2023, p. 114) states, when used as an analytic, allows researchers to "make apparent the various ways in which Indigeneity is mobilized and transformed by urban processes as well as the ways in which Indigeneity transforms what constitutes 'the urban'." Colonialism has always configured urbanity and Indigeneity, as a product of Canadian policy and law, and as Dorries (2023, p. 113) phrases it, "to speak of Indigeneity is always to speak of colonialism and urbanism". Indigenous urbanism requires an understanding of both Indigeneity and urbanity as constantly in flux and open to contestation.

In the context of my study area in the Garden District, I can explore how Indigenous peoples make urban spaces while also challenging colonial understanding of Indigeneity and urbanism. The assumption that cities are not Indigenous spaces is reflected in urban policies, which underline the lack of a defined consultation process for planning with Indigenous people and the lack of incorporation of Indigenous ways of knowing into contemporary planning. These policies ignore the broad territoriality of Indigenous peoples in the Great Lakes region (Dorries, 2023; Porter et al., 2017). Indigenous peoples in Canada practise Indigeneity and urbanism in ways that actively resist how these terms are configured by colonialism. Indigenous urbanism can also help us understand how placemaking at Allan Gardens has taken shape over the years as a culturally significant site for urban Indigenous peoples. Dorries (2023, p. 116) states that engaging in planning and placemaking offers insight into how Indigenous urbanism "emerges as a set of practices that connect people to place by highlighting practices of relationality and life making". Indigenous cultural practices are tied to the Land, and the urban Indigenous peoples' acts of refusal at Allan Gardens are actively restoring their connection to the Land through assertions of Indigenous spaces downtown. Mays (2023) writes that Indigenous peoples, through expressive culture, challenge dispossession in cities and reclaim urban spaces and that (Dorries, 2023, p. 115) "acts of contestation are also part of the ways in which Indigeneity and urban space are co-produced". The Sacred Fire and the built form (the tipis) are ways that urban Indigenous peoples have refused colonial governance and are enacting Indigenous political authority (Dorries, 2023, p. 115) "in urban space to challenge prevailing colonial, capitalist and white supremacist modes of urbanism".

2.3.1 Placemaking

Placemaking in urban settings can be an artistic method to articulate Indigenous identity. Indigenous art challenges and contradicts myths of settlement by intervening in colonial space by asserting Indigenous presence, and can shape new understandings of urban space and time (Dorries, 2023). OPPI and others have said that effective placemaking involves Indigenous peoples having control or power to make decisions that impact them; being able to make decisions for their respective communities not through consultation but through direct action at times (OPPI, 2020). Anishnaabe place names on Toronto streets, and similar efforts to have plant names in Cayuga by FOAG in the Children's Teaching Garden, serve as a way to remind others of Indigenous presence (Friends of Allan Gardens, 2023). Dorries (2023, p. 115) states that "the Canadian state has undermined Indigenous legal orders and political authority and restricted Indigenous input and participation in decision-making in processes that affect Indigenous lands and". Criminalized protest actions are sometimes the only avenue Indigenous peoples have to make their positions heard and influence the outcome of decision-making processes. The Sacred Fire and the medicine gardens at Allan Gardens are an example of Indigenous peoples reclaiming space without the permission of colonial governance structures or planning authorities.

2.3.2 Indigenous Food Sovereignty

Indigenous food systems include the surrounding environment and flora and fauna that Indigenous peoples have interacted with since time immemorial. Food sovereignty is defined by La Via Campesina (Campesina, 2026, p. 2) as "the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through sustainable methods and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems." Additionally, Indigenous food sovereignty can be understood as the relationships between people and their food systems. Cidro et al. (2015, p. 29) refer to Morrison's four main principles that guide food sovereignty, which are: "(1) the recognition that food is sacred; (2) participation in food systems; (3) self-determination; and (4) supportive legislation and policy" (Cidro et al., 2015, p. 29). These principles guide Indigenous peoples on how they view and interact with food; however, in urban settings, they become removed from accessing traditional knowledge that can help address issues of food insecurity and food sovereignty. Furthermore, current public policies have not addressed issues of food security in Canada successfully among

Indigenous populations, especially those residing in urbanized areas (Cheng et al., 2021). A holistic approach is necessary to address issues of food insecurity due to existing colonial structures that impact Indigenous peoples' ability to secure culturally relevant food. Cidro (2015) states that Indigenous food sovereignty contributes to increased food security, and Indigenous resurgence at Allan Gardens by creating medicine gardens revitalizes traditional food systems (Corntassel, 2012).

Indigenous food sovereignty can promote better health for Indigenous Peoples living in urbanized areas. According to Cidro (2015), Western food categories do not represent Indigenous diets. In 2007, Health Canada updated their food guides to incorporate First Nations, Metis, and Inuit knowledge to serve as a healthy foods guideline that acknowledges traditional foods, which can be combined with store-bought foods (Canada, 2002). However, there still exist knowledge gaps when it comes to Indigenous food sovereignty and health, especially for Indigenous peoples living in urban areas compared to rural areas (Ray et al., 2019; Coté, 2016). City of Toronto policies do not acknowledge Land relationships as a determinant of health when addressing health and food insecurity of Indigenous peoples; however, there is a growing recognition that Land relationships can improve determinants of health for urban Indigenous peoples (Ray et al., 2019; Toronto, 2022a). Indigenous food sovereignty acknowledges the relationships that Indigenous peoples have with food that also benefit good mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being (Campesina, 2026; Ray et al., 2019; Cidro et al., 2015). Developing Indigenous food systems in downtown Toronto promotes environmental and social sustainability (McEachern et al., 2022; Ray et al., 2019), while working towards creating more spaces for Indigenous resurgence.

2.3.3 Heterotopias and Thirdspaces

As this research paper focuses on planning theory and process, I draw upon the Western concepts of thirdspace and heterotopia because contemporary planning in urban areas is predominantly informed by Western practices and processes. I sought ways to articulate how planning scholars might understand what is going on in Allan Gardens and the Sacred Fire. I apply these concepts to Allan Gardens and posit that the Sacred Fire can be understood as an Indigenous thirdspace. Soja (1996) writes that there are three urban spaces: firstspace, secondspace, and thirdspace: firstspace is the physical built environment, which is a product of planning laws,

political decisions and urban change over time; secondspace is a conceptual space based on how people imagine space; thirdspace is both real and imagined, and it is about how people live and experience urban spaces. Thirdspaces created by the disempowered aim to reconstruct actual spaces in ways that (Johnson, 2008, p. 45) "allow them to engage more productively in directly oppositional resistance". A thirdspace is a way of thinking about and understanding socially produced spaces (Borch, 2002). Spaces of resistance help to emphasize the importance of the Sacred Fire from a Western perspective, whereas for urban Indigenous peoples the Sacred Fire is more than creating a space of resistance, as it is a place of ceremony, mourning, and a relationship with the Land. Thirdspaces can also be heterotopias, which differ from utopias in that they are real and imagined spaces that act as a mirror to society's values (Foucault, 2019). Soja expanded on Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia in their book, *Thirdspace: journeys to Los Angeles and other real-and-imagined* (Borch, 2002; Foucault, 2019; Johnson, 2008; Soja, 1996), stating that there are various interpretations of what constitutes "thirdspaces" and "heterotopia". For example, Allan Gardens Conservatory and the Sacred Fire are two distinct cultural uses of the land that inhabit the same space but have completely different values imposed on them by society.

Allan Gardens Conservatory and the Sacred Fire site are spaces acknowledged as *part of* society, but spaces operating by *different logics of order* to society, that might even *contradict* the regular workings of the society they are placed *within*. Heterotopias are real spaces, and they are spaces that juxtapose social norms and sometimes suspend them, particularly in how we perceive time and space. Heterotopias are closer to liminal spaces than utopias because, while they are a part of our societies, they function differently from regular spaces; they are in-between norm and marginalized spaces. Foucault provides several examples, such as cemeteries, which used to be built in the centre of communities and are now on the peripheries. These isolated spaces reflect how Western society perceives death. In every heterotopia, there are elements that do not exactly belong together; by fitting into a space and highlighting them, tensions are brought to the foreground in our society. Heterotopias offer a Western way to think critically about how society organizes space and behaviour, as they both exist within social norms and disrupt them. Allan Gardens and the Sacred Fire can be viewed as heterotopias because they function in several capacities: the Friends of Allan Gardens use the park to hold a farmer's market; the gardens and Conservatory spaces; and the Sacred Fire all occupy the same place. The FOAG farmer's market can be considered a "*heterochronie*" (Foucault, 2019, p. 26): an event in a particular space that is

transient and fleeting and occurs only within a specific time; Allan Gardens Conservatory is a heterotopia that juxtaposes several spaces because it is a real place meant to be a microcosm of various environments. Finally, the Sacred Fire, viewed through a Western lens, is a heterotopia of ritual or purification, where access is not prohibited but entry depends on following protocols.

3.0 Policy Review

In this section, I examine existing policies and legal frameworks and discuss how Western approaches to planning differ from Indigenous ways of knowing. I begin by examining the legal frameworks and policies of the federal and Ontario provincial governments, the relevant policies of the Canadian Institute of Planners (CIP) and the Ontario Professional Planners Institute (OPPI), and the City of Toronto's policies. I focus on the planning practices and processes that have shaped the City's approach to planning for the Allan Gardens and Conservatory area within the broader Garden District context. Although not comprehensive, the policy review section highlights policies I believe are relevant to my research. The following policies and legal frameworks outline the Crown's requirements for consulting with Indigenous peoples, the Crown's responsibilities, and how the City works, or strives to work, with Indigenous peoples in downtown Toronto. To complement the review of Western policies, I have also written on Indigenous spirituality because planners must understand that spirituality cannot be separated from Indigenous practices; it is a way of understanding the world and the natural laws that have shaped Indigenous lives since time immemorial.

3.1 Legislative and Policy Framework

The Crown (including both the Canadian federal and Ontario provincial governments) has a fiduciary duty to consult and accommodate Indigenous peoples when considering actions or decisions that may affect potential or established Aboriginal or Treaty claims or rights under the *Constitution* (Dorries, 2023), as further elaborated in the preceding sections of this section. Government and regulatory bodies involved in development and planning activities (including policy or law-making) that may harm Indigenous peoples' ability to practise Indigenous

Spirituality should consider, prevent, and mitigate such impacts (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2024).

My concern is that while the provincial planning policy guidance appears solid, this has not always been the case in practice. For example, municipalities lack clear guidelines on how to conduct consultation, so there is no standardization across Ontario or between municipalities on how to begin consulting with Indigenous Nations and peoples. These documents reference legal orders, the duty to consult, treaties, and Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC); however, Indigenous communities have not always been able to provide input on how to consult with them as sovereign Nations in Ontario. I have analyzed various planning documents for the Allan Gardens area that I deemed relevant to this Major Paper; however, that list is not exhaustive. This lack of guidelines has led to municipalities making planning decisions that impact Indigenous peoples, with no real decision-making power in the planning process. Indigenous peoples are treated as mere stakeholders in the planning process, as described by the OPPI (2020, npn), "that the people for whom these places are created for are just participants in the process; they have no real decision-making power". Municipalities must go beyond consultation and engagement to further prevent and mitigate impacts and facilitate inclusion in design (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2024).

The *Ontario Human Rights Code*, the *Canadian Human Rights Act*, the Canadian *Constitution*, the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples all provide legal protections for Indigenous peoples' fundamental right to practise their religious and spiritual traditions freely and to be treated equally and with dignity. Employers, unions, and housing and service providers under provincial jurisdiction have a legal duty under the Ontario Code to uphold Indigenous peoples' right to be free from discrimination based on creed. As part of this obligation, when there is a negative impact on Indigenous peoples' spiritual beliefs and practices, there is a duty to accommodate up to the point of undue hardship. In practice, this means that, for Allan Gardens, the rights of non-Indigenous residents must also be respected and upheld.

3.2 Federal Policy and Legal Frameworks

In Canada, the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and section 35 of the *Constitution Act*, 1982 recognize and affirm the constitutional rights of Indigenous peoples. These rights include, but are not limited to, the enforcement of treaties and Aboriginal land titles, and the right to preserve cultural practices and activities. These practices and activities can include fishing, logging, hunting, ceremony, and other sacred traditions (Canada, 1982b, 1982a; Canada, 2017; Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2024). Freedom of religion under section 2(a) of the *Canadian Charter* may also extend protection to access to, preservation of, and use of sacred sites and objects. These religious rights do not require that an Indigenous spiritual belief or practice existed at the time of pre-European contact (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2024). For Toronto, this means urban Indigenous people have the right to ceremonies such as the Sacred Fire at Allan Gardens, and to create and maintain medicine gardens.

In R. v. Van der Peet, the Supreme Court of Canada articulated the underlying legal basis for Aboriginal rights (R. v. Van der Peet, [1996] 2 S.C.R. 507, para. 14): "…the doctrine of aboriginal rights exists, and is recognized and affirmed by s. 35(1), because of one simple fact: when Europeans arrived in North America, aboriginal peoples were already here, living in communities on the land, and participating in distinctive cultures, as they had done for centuries. It is this fact, and this fact above all others, which separates aboriginal peoples from all other minority groups in Canadian society and which mandates their special legal, and now constitutional, status". The protections enshrined in Section 35(1) have entrenched understandings of Indigeneity as a category of identity, and laws that define Indigeneity have resulted in cities being places of cultural loss because legal definitions of urbanization and Indigeneity are in opposition.

An "Aboriginal right", as defined by the judicial system in Canada, is an activity that must have an element of practice, custom or tradition integral to the distinctive culture today, and that this practice, custom or tradition has continuity with the practices, custom or tradition and traditions of pre-contact times, that community will have demonstrated that practice, custom or tradition is an Aboriginal right for s. 35(2) (Gibson & O'Faircheallaigh, 2026; Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2024). The Sacred Fire is an example of a pre-contact cultural practice rooted in Indigenous spirituality. As such, the City of Toronto has acknowledged the land use and created

a process Indigenous peoples can use to book a Sacred Fire site. In this policy review, I discuss how legitimizing a cultural practice through Western bureaucracy does not contribute to resurgence.

3.2.1 Indigenous Spirituality

Indigenous spirituality can be understood as a way of life, a way of knowing, or a worldview centred on a relationship with the creator of the land and "all our relations." Indigenous spirituality is also commonly viewed as inseparable from traditional Indigenous culture and identity (Wilson, 2008). Many Indigenous peoples face systemic barriers when practising Indigenous spirituality. These barriers arise when an organization eliminates interpretations of what is protected under the Code on the grounds of creed and fails to recognize Indigenous spiritual beliefs and practices as engaging the Code's protections (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2024). The result is a rigid distinction between culture or tradition on the one hand and religion or creed on the other. However, that does not make sense in an Indigenous context, given the culturally rooted and holistic nature of Indigenous spirituality. Spirituality is closely bound with culture and ways of living in Indigenous communities and requires a more holistic or comprehensive approach. The Sacred Fire at Allan Gardens was initially perceived as an act of refusal/resistance, and the City did not legitimize it until October 2022, which may reflect the City's emerging interpretation of spiritual practice.

3.2.2 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) contains important provisions (Appendix B) that should guide the enforcement of human rights protections for Indigenous peoples' right to access, use, and preserve sacred sites and objects. International agreements, including the Indigenous right to Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) regarding development on their traditional territories, must also be considered when new developments are proposed, such as the proposed expansion of the Allan Gardens' Conservatory. The Sacred Fire at Allan Gardens is an expression of urban Indigenous peoples' right to use, access, and ultimately

preserve sacred sites. Articles 8, 11, 12, 18, and 25 of the UNDRIP reinforce the right to use, create, and maintain the Sacred Fire.

Actions by the City to remove or prevent the Sacred Fire site violate Article 8 s.1(a)(b) because of the connection to the Land, which requires a distinctions-based approach due to the unique needs and experiences of Urban Indigenous peoples based on their geographic residence (Horn, 2022). Furthermore, OPPI states that the articles outlined in the UNDRIP should be recognized in provincial planning policies, based on the Duty to Consult and FPIC, because of the unique role that Indigenous Nations have as Land protectors. The Truth & Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) 94 Calls to Action need to be incorporated into current and future planning policies. The City of Toronto has incorporated UNDRIP and the TRC's Calls to Action in the development of its own Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP).

3.2.3 Truth and Reconciliation Report Calls to Action

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada released a report on June 2, 2015 (Canada, 2015) that appeals to all levels of government, organizations, and people to make societal changes through 94 actions. These actions aim to redress the legacy of residential schools and advance reconciliation. OPPI's response to the then-proposed Provincial Planning Statement 2024 states that "Ontario must review the Truth & Reconciliation Commission's 94 Calls to Action and incorporate key elements into the Provincial Planning Statement" (Basinski and Wiggins, 2024, p. 4). The Calls to Action serve as a constant reminder that more work is needed to change how Indigenous peoples are viewed and the roles they currently occupy in planning. For example, at Allan Gardens, FOAG has an "Indigenous tree interpretation project" (Friends of Allan Gardens, 2023, p. 17) aimed at sharing plant names and stories in multiple Indigenous languages. The acknowledgement of Indigenous plant names can be interpreted as a response to Action 14(iii)(iv) (see Appendix G); however, I argue that the responsibility of creating such projects should not fall solely to non-governmental organizations, and the City of Toronto has failed to implement a similar project in the Garden District.

3.3 Provincial Planning Policies

The Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) has made recommendations to better address the human rights and Aboriginal rights implications of provincial land use planning policies outlined in Ontario's Provincial Planning Statement (PPS) under the *Planning Act*. The PPS states that planning authorities shall consider the interests of Aboriginal communities in conserving cultural heritage and archaeological resources (Ontario, 2024). Additionally, under the *Planning Act*, 1990 (Ontario, 2026), public engagement is a legislated obligation of both municipal and provincial authorities. Furthermore, the *Planning Act* (Ontario, 2026, p. 187) requires municipalities to create a "chapter numbered 3 and entitled 'Indigenous Engagement' that is comprised of the following section: i. [a] section numbered 3.1 and entitled 'Indigenous Engagement' that identifies the processes through which Indigenous communities will be engaged in implementing the official plan."

Additionally, the *Planning Act* requires municipalities to (Ontario, 2026, p. 101) "consult with such persons and public bodies as the municipality considers appropriate. 2020, c. 18, Sched. 17, s. 2 (3)", which would guide the by-laws for areas like Allan Gardens to have sites for cultural uses. The Ontario Professional Planners Institute (OPPI) acknowledges that contemporary colonialism continues to limit Indigenous peoples' ability to shape the design of urban spaces through planning (OPPI, 2020) because of limited representation in consultation and placemaking, and a lack of agency in the planning process. This is visible at Allan Gardens, where the Sacred Fire was viewed as an act of refusal against current by-laws and was retroactively legitimized.

The Ontario Government's PPS guides the province's direction and growth through policy. The PPS is issued under section 3 of the *Planning Act* (Ontario, 2026), which requires that all decisions affecting planning matters shall be consistent with the minimum standards set in the Provincial Planning Statement (Ontario, 2024). I have identified several policies in the Appendices that address planning matters that may directly impact Indigenous peoples. The PPS further states that it shall be implemented in a way that is (Ontario, 2024, p. 32) "consistent with and affirms existing Aboriginal and treaty rights in the *Constitution Act*, 1982" as well as the *Ontario Human Rights Code* and the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.* However, the PPS does not differentiate between urban and rural Indigenous peoples, nor does it define a difference between Nations; they are treated as one. This pan-indigenization approach impacts how Indigenous

communities and peoples are consulted, as different communities and Nations have different forms of governance, and their definitions and understanding of certain terms may also differ. Therefore, when engaging with Indigenous peoples, a new approach must always be created that respects a community's sovereignty.

The PPS encourages coordination with Aboriginal communities on planning matters, including the management of natural and cultural heritage and archaeological resources (Ontario, 2024, p. 41), but there is clearly still work to be done. Cultural heritage, specifically cultural heritage landscape, is defined as a "geographical area that may have been modified by human activity and is identified as having cultural heritage value or interest by a community, including an Indigenous community. The area may include features such as buildings, structures, spaces, views, archaeological sites or natural elements that are valued together for their interrelationship, meaning or association". The City of Toronto has identified the Garden District as a heritage district and aims to conserve the district's cultural heritage and landscape. However, the PPS defines cultural heritage to include, among other things, "buildings, structures, monuments and geographical areas that may have been modified by human activity." This definition does not acknowledge the different worldviews that Indigenous peoples have regarding cultural heritage and landscape. For example, Indigenous peoples understand that a cultural heritage landscape embodies a more holistic understanding and the various connections with the Land. The heritage district study did not recognize the Indigenous history (Toronto, 2021). Ontario (2024, p. 1) recognizes "the unique role Indigenous communities have in land use planning and development, and the contribution of Indigenous communities' perspectives and traditional knowledge to land use planning decisions" and that early engagement to develop cooperative relationship-building between planning authorities and Indigenous communities facilitates knowledge-sharing and informs decision-making in land use planning. The Government of Ontario states that it will recognize the unique role Indigenous communities have in land use planning and development, and the contribution of Indigenous communities' perspectives and traditional knowledge to land use planning decisions. However, the definitions in the PPS and other policy documents are grounded in Western knowledge, and recognition does not ensure that Indigenous communities have the agency to change how decisions are made that affect their communities.

3.3.1 Canadian Institute of Planners and the Ontario Professional Planners Institute

In this section, I discuss the work being undertaken by the Canadian and Ontario professional planning organizations.

The Canadian Institute of Planners (CIP) is the national body representing professional planners in Canada. They advance professional planners and the practice of planning, promotes professional standards, and advocates for better communities and environments. As the national body, CIP has created a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) that guides how planners can work with Indigenous peoples. The RAP was created through extensive engagement and meetings with Indigenous planners and Knowledge Keepers (CIP, 2026) to shape the priorities, principles, and commitments in this document. The RAP sets out a vision for reconciliation through various actions and suggestions on how to implement those actions (CIP, 2026). The RAP is intended to be a resource for individual planners, institutions, and Indigenous partners by integrating Indigenous perspectives in planning and strengthening engagement by fostering respectful and ongoing relationships with Indigenous communities (CIP, 2026). Furthermore, CIP (2024, p. 24) seeks to "direct updates to Official Plans, secondary plans, and bylaws to reflect Indigenous priorities and participation pathways" through the implementation of the six action pillars in the RAP. For Allan Gardens, this means that future Sacred Fires outside of the City-designated area could be created in partnership with urban Indigenous communities.

Similar to CIP, as a professional body for planners, the Ontario Professional Planners Institute (OPPI) is the regulatory body for planning professionals and students in Ontario. They provide support through professional development and practitioner resources to members who are working towards the RPP designations. An "Indigenous Perspectives in Planning" document was published by OPPI (OPPI, 2019) This document aims to move forward in understanding Indigenous perspectives in planning through short- and long-term elements. Some of the goals of OPPI are implementing the TRC's Calls to Action and UNDRIP principles into provincial planning.

3.3.2 Ontario's Urban Indigenous Action Plan

The Ontario Government has co-developed and designed a similar policy framework to the RAP. Urban Indigenous peoples and service providers (Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres (OFIFC), the Metis Nation of Ontario (MNO), the Ontario Native Women's Association (ONWA), and Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation) worked together to develop the Urban Indigenous Action Plan (IAP), which serves as a tool for policy and program development (Ontario, 2018). The IAP (Ontario, 2018, p. 14) aims to remove barriers for "participation of urban Indigenous service providers and communities in local planning processes and in provincial policy and program development, and creating the opportunity for governments to implement more effective responses to local needs". Implementation of ceremonial spaces would address certain community needs, and the IAP aspires to improve services and outcomes for urban Indigenous peoples. UNDRIP and the TRC's Calls to Action have informed the action areas that focus on (Ontario, 2018, p. 7) "reconciliation, education, the child welfare system, health and healthcare, involvement in the justice system and overall wellbeing". The Plan supports the need for better engagement of Indigenous peoples at Allan Gardens.

3.3.3 OPPI's Indigenous Perspectives in Planning Report

The Indigenous Planning Perspectives Task Force authored a report for OPPI in 2019 on advancing "better understanding of Indigenous perspectives on planning and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action; how OPPI as a "regulator" can strengthen its institutional frameworks so the practice of professional planning more effectively acknowledges and supports Indigenous planning approaches and perspectives; and how OPPI (2019, p. 4) as a "member service provider can support its members to work collaboratively with Indigenous communities and individuals". As a regulator, OPPI has a unique opportunity to advance reconciliation in Ontario's planning policies by educating members on implementing UNDRIP and TRC's Calls to Action in Ontario. Furthermore, planners can recognize that treaties between Indigenous Nations and the Crown are legally binding. As OPPI (2019, p. 8) states, "[a] professional planner, especially, should be aware of the status of treaty negotiations, any specific claims, their obligations to consult and accommodate vis-à-vis any project related to land use, as well as the relevant Indigenous views and understandings of that land".

Planners should be knowledgeable in how Indigenous peoples' connection to Land differs from Western understandings of land ownership. By creating policies that acknowledge Indigenous land use practices, spaces like the Sacred Fire at Allan Gardens can be created in collaboration with urban Indigenous peoples rather than having such spaces retroactively legitimized through City planning. OPPI (2019, p. 11) notes that "[i]n urban areas, where the majority of Indigenous people reside, engagement is frustrated by not having an apparent representative institution or governance structure"; this frustration can be alleviated by having planners understand what is required to develop relationships with urban Indigenous peoples, and I have included a description of how I underwent this process at Allan Gardens in this paper's Introduction. Furthermore, Indigenous communities may have insufficient capacity and time to respond to requests for consultation. Therefore, it is left to planning authorities to take the first step to working with urban Indigenous peoples, communities, and service providers by building and maintaining respectful relationships.

Unlike the IAP created by the Ontario Government, OPPI's document goes a step further by identifying that members must gain greater cultural competency to facilitate the integration of Indigenous planning principles into contemporary planning practices. Planners must also accept that planning has been used as a colonizing tool (OPPI, 2019, p. 13), "[a]s a Western-based practice, the legacy of professional planning has sustained the colonial mindset and intentions", and as such planning must evolve to not only recognising Indigenous planning (OPPI, 2019, p. 18), but "to enhance course curricula to learn about Indigenous Peoples, the TRC's Calls to Action, UNDRIP, treaties and Aboriginal rights, and Indigenous worldviews, teachings, and practices related to planning". The changes to the planning profession not only apply to students in accredited programs, but to current planners and require new standards to inform the administration of the certification and accreditation processes administered by the Professional Standards Board (OPPI, 2019). These changes would have long-term implications on planning with Indigenous peoples and ideally work towards stronger reconciliation actions for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Ontario. The Shared Path initiative states (Admin, 2025, npn) that it "will support OPPI in the development of a First Nations, Métis, Inuit Practice Guide on Engagement and Consultation to equip professional planners with critical tools and insights to apply to their practice." This presents a valuable opportunity for planners to access the tools needed to engage and consult with Indigenous peoples and advance reconciliation in urban areas.

3.4 City of Toronto Policies

The City of Toronto has developed a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) (2022, p. 7) outlining actions it will take from 2022 to 2032 to achieve "truth, reconciliation and justice to the extent that it remains consistent with the self-identified needs of Indigenous communities in Toronto". The plan's commitments to urban Indigenous peoples in Toronto have been shaped by the City's Statement of Commitment to Aboriginal Peoples, the Calls to Action set out in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's final report (2022, p. 7), "the principles detailed in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and the Calls for Justice outlined by the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls". The values that the City planning attributes to Allan Gardens consist of decolonization and powershifting, inclusivity, and respect because the City aims to partner with Indigenous communities, organizations, collectives, and cultural professionals and scholars to decolonize City processes and shift power to Indigenous communities with the goal of revitalizing (Toronto, 2022, p. 16) "Indigenous rights to self-determination, self-governance, [and] land stewardship". The Sacred Fire is an example of urban Indigenous peoples expressing their right to steward the Land and self-governance, but not yet an example of true "powershifting" as suggested in the document.

Furthermore, the City recognizes that working with Indigenous peoples cannot have a one-size-fits-all approach because each Nation and community has their own needs. The inclusion of children, youth, Elders, and Two-Spirit and LGBTQ+ peoples in decision-making processes is also a consideration for the City (Toronto, 2022). For Allan Gardens, this means that the City will strive to respect (Toronto, 2022, p. 16) "the rights of First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples to be self-determining and self-governing, and these commitments will be appropriately reflected and effectively demonstrated across all of the City's processes and ways of working from this point forward." The Sacred Fire has led to adapting City by-laws to reflect the Indigenous land use through community consultation.

The principles in the City's RAP that most affect the urban Indigenous peoples at Allan Gardens are as follows (Toronto, 2022, p. 17):

> 1. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is the framework for reconciliation at all levels and across all sectors of Canadian society.;
>
> 2. First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples, as the original peoples of this country and as self-determining peoples, have Treaty, constitutional, and human rights that must be recognized and respected.;
>
> 3. Reconciliation is a process of healing of relationships that requires public truth sharing, apology, and commemoration that acknowledge and redress past harms.;
>
> 4. Reconciliation requires constructive action on addressing the ongoing legacies of colonialism that have had destructive impacts on Aboriginal Peoples' education, cultures and languages, health, child welfare, the administration of justice, and economic opportunities and prosperity.;
>
> 6. All Canadians, as Treaty Peoples, share responsibility for establishing and maintaining mutually respectful relationships.;
>
> 7. The perspectives and understandings of Aboriginal Elders and Traditional Knowledge Carriers of the ethics, concepts, and practices of reconciliation are vital to long-term reconciliation.; and
>
> 8. Supporting Aboriginal Peoples' cultural revitalization and integrating Indigenous knowledge systems, oral histories, laws, protocols, and connections to the land into the reconciliation process are essential.

These principles have shaped present policies in Toronto's Official Plan (see Appendix D), Downtown Plan (Appendix E), and Downtown Parks and Public Realm Plan (see Appendix F). The UNDRIP is used to inform policy direction and has been adopted by the City to guide actions towards reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. The selected principles apply to Allan Gardens because of how the Sacred Fire was retroactively legitimized, and through interviewing research participants, I determined that the City has further to go to meet its reconciliation goals. Furthermore, the RAP has several actions to share power, improve relationships with Indigenous peoples and organizations, enhance Indigenous civic engagement, and support Indigenous placekeeping (Toronto, 2022a). The Sacred Fire at Allan Gardens is an expression of sovereignty, and the City has committed to include and (Toronto, 2022, p. 28) "respect the perspectives, needs, and realities of treaty and territorial partners in planning and decision-making." The shift in policy direction in both the RAP and Official Plan occurred after the Sacred Fire was legitimized, and the City now aims to co-create protocols for working with Indigenous organizations and collectives to identify community needs that are not being met through Indigenous funding opportunities at the City. This can include identifying and removing barriers to city funding, and providing sustainable funding and resources for urban Indigenous communities (Toronto, 2022a). Additionally, Action

15 of the RAP (Toronto, 2022c) aims to reduce barriers for Indigenous peoples accessing Sacred Fires.

As mentioned in the Introduction to this paper (p. 2), planning has historically excluded Indigenous peoples from meaningfully participating. The City of Toronto acknowledges the need to create avenues and opportunities for (Toronto, 2022, p. 30) "Indigenous Peoples to be directly involved in decision-making at various levels, places and spaces at the City of Toronto". Public spaces like Allan Gardens, Norwood Park, and Christie Pits Park now have Sacred Fire sites (Costa, 2022; OSKYA, 2022; Toronto, 2022b; Urban Squares, 2024) as a result of community action and the City's recognition of a gap in services that meet Indigenous needs. From my experience of working with the City of Toronto as an Eco Program Instructor in the Community Gardens unit in Parks & Recreation, I know that Urban Forestry has begun incorporating Indigenous practices by asking urban Indigenous Elders to participate in tree planting events, which aligns with (Toronto, 2022, p. 30) "A. Expand inclusion of Indigenous ceremonies, practices, and protocols into official City events."

Furthermore, the City has been making efforts to increase the involvement of (Toronto, 2022, p. 30) "Indigenous governments, agencies, organizations, and collectives to open their doors and processes for collaborative decision-making within many divisions whose work impacts Indigenous Peoples, lands and waters". As a former City employee, I know that there have been efforts made to create areas for Indigenous food sovereignty, such as at Etienne Brule Park (CBC, 2017) along the Humber River, and the four medicine gardens (Figure 1) in the Garden District created in partnership with several local organizations mentioned in section 1.2 Allan Gardens Site Context (p. 6) (Friends of Allan Gardens, 2023). Areas for Indigenous food sovereignty and other cultural sites at the Garden District align with the City's policies aimed at improving Indigenous placemaking and placekeeping. Placemaking and placekeeping, the City (Toronto, 2022, p. 44) notes, "creates and nurtures space, in process and policy, for ceremony, teaching and community; strengthens Indigenous connections with lands and waters; and builds cultural competency and capacity for land-based Indigenous engagement. The outcomes of placemaking and placekeeping initiatives are varied, and all are critical for the health and well-being of Indigenous Peoples." The City has begun to move towards including and understanding Indigenous worldviews in its planning policies and documents that are created with reconciliation in mind. Allan Gardens has

created several areas for placemaking that have gone beyond art installations, such as the medicine gardens found around the park and the raised beds in the Children's Teaching Garden.

Planning policy documents such as the Garden District Heritage Conservation District Plan, the City's Official Plan, the Downtown Parks and Public Realm Plan, and the Downtown Plan contain several policies aimed at improving reconciliation efforts with urban Indigenous peoples. The Garden District Heritage Conservation District Plan provides policies, guidelines, and procedures for managing change in the District and applies to both privately and municipally owned properties where change is proposed (Toronto, 2021). Policies 8.1.1 and 8.1.2 focus on conserving cultural heritage value in new developments and on maintaining the function of Allan Gardens as a (Toronto, 2021, p. 83) "designed landscape anchor to the Garden District" to conserve the cultural heritage landscape. The Plan notes the historical presence of Indigenous peoples in the District but does not address Indigenous perspectives on cultural heritage value, because (Qviström, 2025, p. 75) "landscape management practices in settler-colonial societies prioritise ecological, conservation, and aesthetic values that subjugate the complex and multidimensional relationships that Indigenous communities have with their living ancestral landscapes". This prioritization of Western values is reflected in the heritage conservation policies. For example, Policy 2.5.1 (Toronto, 2021, p. 22) states that "the intent of the management plan is to ensure that archaeological sites are adequately considered and studied prior to any form of development or land use change that may affect them". The Plan's policies focus on the built environment and on maintaining the colonial-built environment's aesthetic and historical archaeological artifacts, rather than on creating a cultural heritage landscape that strengthens Indigenous identity in the Garden District.

The City of Toronto's Official Plan is a planning document that guides policy direction and establishes the City's priorities and principles of reconciliation (Toronto, 2026b). Chapter One of the Official Plan aims to create a future where (Toronto, 2026, p. 1-1) "Indigenous worldviews, cultures and ways of life hold a respected, celebrated, prominent and distinctive place in Toronto". This can mean a greater role for Indigenous peoples in the decision-making process for current and future planning, and the integration of their principles into City planning and policies. Policy 1.2 (Toronto, 2026b, pp. 1-5) states "as our city evolves, so must our priorities if we are going to advance reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples and create a city that is accessible, equitable and

inclusive". This sets the planning priority for reconciliation in the City with a goal of helping the City and the public better understand the realities of urban Indigenous peoples.

The Official Plan (Toronto, 2026b, p. 1-7) states that "Toronto will be a city where Indigenous worldviews, cultures, and ways of life are respected and celebrated", and as such the City will advance reconciliation by:

- recognizing the importance of access to land and water and land stewardship to the Indigenous community of Toronto;
- amplifying Indigenous voices in planning processes through respectful, meaningful, and early engagement;
- supporting opportunities for Indigenous prosperity, placemaking, and placekeeping; and
- moving beyond land acknowledgements to create tangible and meaningful action (Toronto, 2026b, p. 1).

The changes to City by-laws at Allan Gardens are an example of how the principles and policies are being implemented to further reconciliation, with an acknowledgment that the City has not always planned with respect for Indigenous perspectives in mind. Unlike the Garden District Heritage Conservation District Plan, the Official Plan recognizes the differences in cultural heritage in policy 2.2.1 (Appendix D). Furthermore, 3.1.1, the Public Realm of the Official Plan states (Toronto, 2026b, p. 3-3), "consultation, partnerships and collaboration with Indigenous communities will be encouraged in the planning, design and development of new, expanded or improved streets, parks and open spaces. This may include the celebration and recognition of Indigenous culture and history, along with cultural and natural heritage, through place-making, naming, wayfinding, monuments, interpretive features, public art, partnerships and programming." The Friends of Allan Gardens (2026) have a naming project for trees, and the City creating Sacred Fire sites conforms with the goals set out in this policy but has been put on hold.

The Downtown Secondary Plan has a series of goals, which are grouped around the themes of complete communities, connectivity, prosperity, resiliency and responsibility that establish outcomes the Downtown Plan intends to achieve as growth continues. The study area (Toronto, 2026a) is bounded by Lake Ontario to the south, Bathurst Street to the west, the mid-town rail corridor and Rosedale Valley Road to the north and the Don River to the east, which guides future

growth of the area. Whereas the Parks and Public Realm Plan outlines several goals that affect Allan Gardens directly rather than policies affecting a greater area, such as "improv[ing] connections between streets and the edges of the significant parks and open spaces along the street including Allan Gardens […], improve the streetscape for walking, transit stops, social gathering, public outdoor seating, café seating and landscaping," and "enhance entrances to Allan Gardens" (Toronto, 2018, pp. 97, 105). The policies found in the Parks and Public Realm section detail how the City aims to create a link to Indigenous histories as a goal for improving public spaces. For example, policy 7.1.3 (Toronto, 2026a, p. 22) states that the City "provide neighbourhood hubs and civic spaces that allow for social interaction, healthy lifestyles and a range of activities", which includes Indigenous spaces. Furthermore, the objectives for planning, design and development of parks include policies 7.3.2, 7.3.3, 7.3.4, and 7.3.5 (Toronto, 2026a) that acknowledge contemporary Indigenous presence downtown and identify areas that need improvement, such as site-specific placemaking that recognizes the cultural and natural heritage of Allan Gardens. A majority of City planning policies now aim to work in partnership and collaboration with Indigenous communities, such as in policy 7.47; however, the policy encourages partnership and collaboration (Toronto, 2026a, p. 34) "in the planning, design and development of parks and the public realm", which is not the same as requiring because it is simply a suggestion; a move towards acknowledgement of Indigenous governance, but not in action.

In this policy review I have discussed how a shift towards acknowledging Indigenous ways of knowing. However, the policies discussed are not binding requirements for planners, since terms such as 'acknowledge' and 'recognize' may be interpreted as recommendations rather than requirements. The policies governing the Garden District's heritage status are relatively stringent and should broaden the definition of a cultural heritage landscape to incorporate Indigenous understandings of cultural landscapes. Merely recognizing the historical and contemporary Indigenous presence in the Garden District does not adequately reflect the cultural landscape of urban Indigenous peoples. Furthermore, I support policies that aim to connect Allan Gardens to Indigenous histories because they provide an educational opportunity for non-Indigenous City residents. However, the policies also serve as a reminder of the continual dispossession of Indigenous peoples, and I strongly support a further shift in policy direction to one that requires direct Indigenous involvement in shaping the Garden District. By requiring early engagement with

urban Indigenous peoples and moving towards Indigenous decision-making rather than advisory councils/committees, the City of Toronto can better reflect Toronto as Indigenous Land.

4.0 Indigenous Research Methodologies

In this section, I discuss the Indigenous scholars I have drawn upon, who have shaped how I conducted my research and how I have strived to understand an Indigenous research paradigm. The Indigenous scholars I draw on write about how to conduct research with Indigenous peoples and how to do research in a place where Land has agency (DeerInWater, 2025; Liboiron, 2021; Museus & Wang, 2023; Rück, 2019; Smith, 2022; Watts, 2013). I rely on tools of futurity that work to integrate more people into community action based on their abilities (Harjo, 2019), such as the importance of reciprocity and relationality, as I understand and apply these concepts in this research paper. Reciprocity in the context of my research project means creating and maintaining relationships, understanding my responsibilities as a researcher and Indigenous person (Wilson, 2008). These concepts not only help researchers understand how to begin ethically and respectfully conducting research with Indigenous peoples, but also the requirements that underlie interactions with the natural environment (Koleszar-Green, 2019). Being in a reciprocal relationship with the Land has several outcomes, such as improving food sovereignty and respecting relationships with all beings. Simpson notes that reciprocity improves people's food security and sovereignty because of the understanding that resources are limited and must be used in a respectful manner (Klein, 2013). For Allan Gardens, it was important for me to clearly explain why I wanted to interview people, and how the knowledge that is being shared shapes my research outcomes.

Part of being a Guest in another Nation's territory means understanding reciprocal relationships; for example, Guests are expected to explain (Koleszar-Green, 2019, p. 170) "who they are, where they were coming from, how they got to 'this place' and what their intentions are in entering the community", and as such, I explained to the people I wanted to interview who I am, where I'm from, and what I hope to do after finishing this Master's in Environmental Studies program. Allan Gardens became a place where other Indigenous peoples practice and share their teachings, and as Harjo (2019) writes about interstitial places, I found that the conservatory and surrounding grounds were used as activist spaces. Through collective power and community, Allan

Gardens has become a multi-layered space for urban Indigenous peoples to embody their culture, whether at the Sacred Fire, inside the Palm House to learn from Creators Garden, or by participating in different events led by Taiaiako'n Preservation Society. The Indigenous futures created at Allan Gardens result from community organizing and knowledge sharing, and this Major Paper takes a similar approach, placing Indigenous thought at the forefront to ensure the Indigenous future I aim to create with this research is grounded in reciprocity, respect, and relationality.

4.1 Land and Place

"Colonialism, first, foremost, and always, is about Land" (Liboiron, 2021, p. 10).

Throughout this paper, I capitalized Land because, as Zinga (2013, p. 300) state, "when we are referring to it as a proper name [we are] indicating a primary relationship rather than when used in a more general sense". Whereas land without capitalization (Liboiron, 2021, p. 6) "refers to landscapes as a fixed geographical and physical space that includes earth, rocks, and waterways", 'Land' extends beyond a material fixed space and is a spiritually infused place (Liboiron, 2021, p. 6) "grounded in interconnected and interdependent relationships, cultural positioning, and is highly contextualized". For Indigenous peoples, Land also encompasses the interconnected relationships among (Liboiron, 2021, p. 7) "plants, animals, air, water, humans, history, and events recognized by Indigenous communities". When "land" is not capitalized, it refers to the colonial worldview that treats landscapes as common and universal. More specifically, I refer to a Western conceptualization of land as empty (*terra nullius*), which asserts Western ownership rights over the land.

Indigenous peoples, through their worldviews, understand that living beings and Land have agency, in the same way that Western people understand humans as having agency. Watts (2013) writes that Indigenous peoples understand that Land has agency, and this understanding has shaped how Indigenous peoples interact and build relationships with the Land. The concept of (Watts, 2013, p. 21) "Place-Thought is based upon the premise that land is alive and thinking and that humans and non-humans derive agency through the extensions of these thoughts". Land is never conceived as something that can be bought, sold or traded by Indigenous peoples because doing

that is anathema to the very idea that you are essentially selling a family member (refer to the creation stories of Sky Woman and First Woman) (Watts, 2013). If Land is animate, then it is full of thought, desire, contemplation, and will; this understanding that all living things contain spirit and therefore agency means that non-human beings choose how they reside, interact, and develop relationships with other non-humans (Watts, 2013).

In the context of Allan Gardens, who has the right to speak for the Land and make decisions for the Land? Better yet, who can interpret the Land's needs and desires? Land having agency also means Indigenous peoples' actions must be intentional toward the Land's agency (i.e., land use planning). The report by the Indigenous Planning Perspectives Task Force (OPPI, 2019, p. 12) states that "Land use — we need to term it differently. It's not there for our use. It should be 'land relationship planning.' Building a relationship with the land around us. Take into consideration what the land is telling us." In section 6.1 (pp. 47-50), I further discuss how land relationships shape how Indigenous peoples approach planning for their communities. Watts (2013, p. 32) writes, "[a]s Indigenous peoples, it is not only an obligation to communicate with Place-Thought (ceremonies with land, territory, the four directions, etc.), but it ensures our continued ability to act and think according to our cosmologies". The Sacred Fire and other ceremonies at Allan Gardens are ways urban Indigenous peoples continue to communicate with Place-Thought, and can be considered a thirdspace. As an Indigenous thirdspace, the Sacred Fire creates a space for community and ceremony that is missing in the Garden District.

The policy review demonstrates how planning policies in Ontario and Toronto are evolving to advance reconciliation by adopting articles of UNDRIP, implementing the actions outlined in the TRC's report, and developing their respective reconciliation policy documents; however, the *Planning Act* continues to treat Indigenous peoples as public bodies, rather than individual nations worthy of making their own planning decisions. Furthermore, the current policies are rooted in Western epistemology, which has failed to understand Indigenous self-determination. I use Indigenous thought in the conceptual framework to illustrate differences in epistemology, ontology, and axiology; in my view, a core difference is Place-Thought, whereas Western planning attributes agency only to humans. By understanding the epistemological differences between Indigenous and Western knowledge systems, planners can work with urban Indigenous peoples to advance reconciliation. Acts of refusal can be considered a result of these epistemological

differences, and planners can better address urban Indigenous needs by knowing their Treaty responsibilities, understanding Place-Thought, and recognizing Indigenous peoples' rights to self-determination.

The literature and policy review outlines the concepts I use to examine the Sacred Fire as a cultural and thirdspace. The Indigenous scholars I draw on to inform my analysis differ from Western approaches to planning because of how they understand Land. These differences have contributed to the ongoing dispossession of Indigenous peoples, including their disconnection from the Land and exclusion from planning-related decision-making. Placemaking offers a way to address Land dispossession caused by settler-colonial states. However, Indigenous peoples continue to be treated as stakeholders rather than equal partners, particularly in planning decisions. Existing policies do not require processes that extend beyond advisory committees or councils, which provide policy recommendations but lack the authority to develop planning policies grounded in Indigenous principles. Placemaking and placekeeping can serve as valuable starting points for more fully recognizing that the City of Toronto is situated on Indigenous Land.

5.0 Methodology

In this section, I discuss my research methods and justifications, along with the underlying methodology that I relied on (see section 5.0: Indigenous Research Methodologies (pp. 37 – 40) on how I understand an Indigenous research paradigm). I begin by stating my research questions and justifications, followed by the methods (qualitative) to build relationships and ultimately gain knowledge about the Garden District, specifically the Sacred Fire site at Allan Gardens. The use of Indigenous methodologies at the forefront of designing my research is of greater importance than any Western methodology that has historically been extractive and has been met with distrust due to alienation of Indigenous peoples and its associated harms (Smith, 2022). I will in no shape or form contest Indigenous methodologies/cosmologies, as they are perfectly suitable and appropriate for working with urban Indigenous peoples; however, planning practices and definitions must be disseminated to better understand the needs of Indigenous peoples residing in urbanized locations (specifically Toronto), such as Indigenous planning theory and practice, and Western planning practices and processes. I have valued the importance of relationality in research,

and therefore it is at the forefront of my research project design because without creating relationships between my potential participants, the knowledge and experience gained from the time I spent at Allan Gardens would be extractive (Liboiron, 2021; Wilson, 2008).

5.1 Research Questions and Justifications

5.1.1 Research Question 1: How do Indigenous people already do planning?

From my research, I had to first understand how Indigenous peoples, specifically urban-based peoples, plan in Toronto to establish a baseline understanding of traditional knowledge that so far has formed the basis for cultural identity, spiritual practices, and survival strategies in urban areas (Barry & Thompson-Fawcett, 2020; DeerInWater, 2025; Dorries, 2023). By understanding planning as done by urban Indigenous people, I now better understand the impacts of colonization and removal from traditional territories in terms of what was lost, maintained, or adapted.

5.1.2 Research Question 2: How did the Sacred Fire at Allan Gardens become legitimized by City planning?

Urban Indigenous peoples' political movements and acts of refusal helped legitimize the Sacred Fire, along with support from non-governmental organizations like the Friends of Allan Gardens. Understanding how this process began and led to the creation of a pilot project that established three permanent Sacred Fires in Toronto may provide guidance for future projects that maintain and enhance urban Indigenous cultural continuity.

5.1.3 Research Question 3: How is Toronto City planning incorporating Indigenous planning?

The establishment of cultural sites at Garden District and beyond showcases how political action and partnership with Indigenous peoples can enhance Indigenous peoples' cultural continuity in urban centres. The incorporation of Indigenous planning can also contribute to improved greenspaces that focus on quality access to the natural environment. I developed specific

questions that helped me understand how the City may be incorporating Indigenous planning, such as:

a. What are planners doing now, such as duty to consult, to incorporate Indigenous planning in urban areas?
b. What does that look like in the Garden District?
c. At a micro level, how has the TOCore Plan incorporated Indigenous planning? Has it moved beyond land acknowledgements, social services, and other undue burdens—for example, requiring Indigenous peoples to pressure the City to address disproportionately high rates of homelessness?

5.2 Methods

This research primarily consists of talking to people involved in cultural practices in the Garden District. Through these interviews, literature and policy review, and my previous interactions in the area, I can tell a story of how the Sacred Fire was established as a form of Indigenous resurgence in an urban area from my perspective and understanding. I have included mapping (Google Earth/Literature) to provide context.

I conducted three semi-structured interviews comprising five to seven questions (see Appendix A). The interview participants met the following criteria:

- 1 Indigenous community member residing in the Allan Gardens neighbourhood;
- 1 registered charitable organization employee; and
- 1 City employee who works closely with the communities in the Garden District

I conducted the interviews in person at the Allan Gardens Conservatory or at the interviewee's home. Each interview lasted approximately one hour and was audio-recorded using a DJI Mic Mini 2, courtesy of Professor Lisa Myers and the Wild Garden Media Centre, connected to my cell phone with the participants' consent. I offered a $100 honorarium in the form of a prepaid Mastercard/Visa for their participation in this research project. The Indigenous participant was offered a gift of tobacco and tortillas that I had made as a thank you for their knowledge

sharing, following their Nation's protocols (Koleszar-Green, 2019; Liboiron, 2021; Wilson, 2008). Before the interviews, I spoke to my participants about the nature of my research, my research goals and objectives. I assigned the following pseudonyms to the three participants in my paper: Alfie (charitable organization non-Indigenous employee), Rusty (non-Indigenous City staff), and Honey (Indigenous Garden District resident). I would have liked to interview more people to have more opportunity to explore my questions, but I was left with limited time because of the lengthy human participants review process, discussed below.

I have sought to incorporate Indigenous methodologies into my interview process, such as explicitly telling my participants that the interviews were more of a conversation, which resulted in some of my participants sharing stories and following their own line of thinking (DeerInWater, 2025). The conversations became opportunities for mutual knowledge sharing rather than a way to extract knowledge from my participants. I also shared food/drinks with all participants during and after their respective interviews.

I analyzed the interviews and incorporated relevant quotes, using pseudonyms, into this Major Paper, with attention to topics such as Indigenous consultation, cultural sovereignty, and land-based practices. Additional themes emerged during the analysis, conducted in collaboration with my research supervisor, Dr. Laura Taylor. These interview findings informed the written component of my Major Paper, particularly as it relates to the Allan Gardens neighbourhood. A draft of the Major Paper may be shared with participants who expressed interest in reviewing the findings. I will respectfully incorporate their feedback into the final version of the Major Paper, before or after my final Master in Environmental Studies examination.

5.3 Research Ethics

I note that the human participants review at York University proved to be a big hurdle. I first submitted my application in October 2025 and received final approval in May 2026. Several rounds of resubmissions were required to more clearly articulate the scope and purpose of my research project. This arduous process is for me an example of multiple understandings of urban Indigenous peoples and their inclusion in a research project. For example, for the Indigenous Research Ethics Board (IREB), I first had to define what I meant by "community," since this

concept is central to understanding whom I would interview. I defined community as a unified body of individuals, such as Indigenous peoples with common interests living in a particular area; a group of Indigenous peoples with a common characteristic or interest living together within a larger society in the Garden District and at Allan Gardens Conservatory and park. This concept was necessary to explain that my research focus was on urban Indigenous peoples and not on unhoused communities.

The IREB had concerns regarding research with Indigenous individuals who are unhoused. This concern elevated my ethics proposal from low risk to moderate risk because it required additional review; I had to create an emergency plan for working with vulnerable populations, in this case Indigenous peoples and unhoused individuals. I needed to show that I understood how to ethically and safely conduct research, which involved creating an emergency plan that detailed how I would respond if there was an emergency to ensure the safety of the participants and myself (McConkey et al., 2024; Toronto, 2023; Walker, 2005). I also created a document that I shared prior to the interviews, which contained my research questions, interview questions, and mental/spiritual health resources participants could access if needed during and after the interview. IREB raised concerns that my research focused on the experiences of unhoused individuals in Allan Gardens who happened to be Indigenous; however, my research focused on Indigenous peoples' experiences and their conceptualizing of space (at Allan Gardens), which may include unhoused individuals living at Allan Gardens. This distinction matters because my research focuses on how urban Indigenous peoples have been able to plan in the Garden District.

Another concern of the IREB was that the Indigenous participants I wanted to interview would be speaking on behalf of their Nation regarding their experiences and planning; however, as I understood the process that the Great Lakes Nations undertake to make decisions for their respective Nations involves the Clan Mothers (Jacobs, 1991; Krouse & Howard, 2009); I stated that I was not seeking a consensus or a representation from a participant's Nation, instead, I was interested in how various urban Indigenous peoples who may come from different Nations coexist and plan a shared space at Allan Gardens. I did not use photographs of the Sacred Fire at Allan Gardens due to cultural protocols, and Elders and community members did not give me permission; instead, I relied on photographs of the general area and aerial views. I provided a verbal description of the Sacred Fire to the research participants for context.

5.3.1 Analysis

After the interviews, and following a grounded theory approach (Dorries, 2012; Oktay 2012) I wrote my immediate post-interview thoughts in a Microsoft Word document, where I identified themes such as thirdspace (see Section 4.1 Land relationships and thirdspaces, p. 43). I uploaded all three recordings to my personal laptop from my phone. I then transcribed the relevant audio portions that I incorporated into Section 6.0 Findings and Discussion (pp. 46 - 56). I paid close attention to themes regarding Indigenous cultural expressions, and how planning policies and decisions have affected the Sacred Fire in its design and perception by urban Indigenous peoples, and the non-Indigenous residents of the Garden District.

5.3.2 Indigenous Data Sovereignty

I followed the First Nation Principles of OCAP (ownership, control, access, possession; see (Adelson & Mickelson, 2022) as my guiding framework. I explained to my research participants that any information they shared with me will always belong to them; that includes the interview recordings and any information that I quote from them in this research paper. I informed my participants that at any point in my research, they have the right to access the information they have shared with me and to decline the use of any information they have shared. Implementing the OCAP principles is context-based, such as how to manage the transfer of ownership rights over the research data. The current Canadian *Copyright Act* does not account for Indigenous concepts of communal cultural heritage rights or protection (Adelson & Mickelson, 2022). However, I assured my research participants that I would transfer all their data to them upon request and delete it wherever possible. I have shared a draft of my research paper with Honey.

6.0 Findings and Discussion

This section presents my research findings and explains how they address my research questions. Here, I synthesize insights from the literature and policy reviews and apply them to

Allan Gardens' Sacred Fire site as an Indigenous thirdspace. I also examine how moving beyond recognizing Indigenous histories can advance reconciliation. I discuss how a binational/bicultural framework can support Indigenous self-determination within settler-colonial states. My findings underscore the need for planners to develop greater cultural competency to better understand the implications of working on Indigenous land. Furthermore, non-Indigenous peoples, including myself as an Indigenous person, living and working outside my traditional territory, must understand their Treaty responsibilities. Throughout this section, I note the importance of connecting with the Land through cultural practices. Furthermore, city planning must change to incorporate Indigenous principles into practice in ways that extend beyond placemaking. In my view, Indigenous peoples have long been expected to adapt their ways of life to exist within settler-colonial states, while the reverse has rarely been undertaken.

Through my conversations with my research participants, Alfie, Rusty, and Honey, I came to several findings that have shaped Allan Gardens and the surrounding area. I came to several findings that have shaped Allan Gardens and the surrounding area. I present these findings in six main "themes" that emerged through my reading and listening. These are listed here and discussed further below:

1. I posit that the Sacred Fire is an Indigenous thirdspace. I use the concept of thirdspace to describe the Sacred Fire site and the Allan Gardens Conservatory as a way of talking about how meaningful these areas are to urban Indigenous peoples. Allan Gardens is an Indigenous landscape where urban Indigenous peoples can meaningfully connect with nature and each other. Further, the City needs Indigenous thirdspaces because they provide meaningful connections to the Land.

2. Allan Gardens' physical design elements have created a park where the experience of that use feels like it was intended to be transitory, which is counter to the Indigenous and unhoused experience.

3. Allan Gardens can be usefully imagined as a heterotopia because of the protocols required to enter the Sacred Fire, alongside the various uses of the land and the various spaces of contradictions, such as the Conservatory and farmer's market.

4. The need to integrate Indigenous planning and principles goes beyond mere "placemaking" as suggested in contemporary planning policies and processes. This goes beyond the inclusion of Indigenous art, naming, or even spaces for Indigenous gathering (such as in Ookwemin Minising, for example). Those do represent positive efforts but do not go far enough.

5. The City of Toronto must work towards sharing power or a binational/bicultural framework of governance (Johnson, 2008) to ensure urban Indigenous peoples can plan according to their principles.

6. Various contentions and frictions exist between Garden District residents and urban Indigenous peoples, and among urban Indigenous peoples themselves at Allan Gardens, which shape how the space is conceptualized and shared.

6.1 Theme 1: Land relationships and Thirdspaces

I posit that the Sacred Fire is an Indigenous thirdspace because, as Alfie and Rusty stated in my discussions with them, the Sacred Fire provides various services to urban Indigenous peoples, such as a place to stay overnight, bus tickets to their home reservation, and functions as a community space for unhoused Indigenous peoples. The Sacred Fire also serves as a home for the Fire Keepers and Indigenous peoples who are in ceremony. I defined a thirdspace as an area that creates a place for Indigenous community to gather and communicate with Place-Thought. Not all my interviewees used the word "thirdspace"; however, they all mentioned the need for community-focused areas.

Alfie stressed the importance of the Sacred Fire for urban Indigenous peoples when he stated that the Sacred Fire has a positive meaning as a form of reconciliation within the city and acts as an example of how to assert Indigenous rights in urban areas. Furthermore, I believe the City of Toronto has a need for adequate thirdspaces that are free or low-cost, preferably free, as that reduces barriers around accessibility. Allan Gardens, according to Alfie and Rusty, is a valuable thirdspace in the City; Rusty spoke of the need for thirdspaces in Toronto, and Allan Gardens is such a space, and Alfie shared this perspective by elaborating that the Friends of Allan Gardens strives to create programmes and events that are free or low-cost at Allan Gardens.

Additionally, the conservatory expansion is proposed to have more spaces for events that will contribute to improving Allan Gardens as a thirdspace. The conservatory greenhouses attract not only people who live in Toronto, but tourists from other parts of the world. Furthermore, as such a highly valued thirdspace Allan Gardens showcases how Western society views the natural environment and landscapes. Greenhouses have played a role in colonialism (Baber, 2016; Nielsen, 2025), and the values Western society attaches to plants are demonstrated inside, where plants are meant to be seen and admired, not interacted with.

For Indigenous peoples, plants have agency (Watts, 2013), which means they are treated with a different intentionality. Indigenous thirdspaces are created through other practices, such as the Sacred Fire as a place for community and ceremony to communicate with Place-Thought. Indigenous landscapes reflect relationships that have developed since time immemorial, and greenhouses, as simulacra of natural environments, do not allow similar relationships to form. Approaches to understanding landscapes and how they are created can affect Land relationships for urban Indigenous peoples. Connecting meaningfully with the Land is highly important for Indigenous peoples, and living in urban areas like Toronto creates barriers to fostering those Land relationships. Honey stated, "feeling disconnected from the natural rhythms of the Earth and Land, and how the seasons govern so much more of how life moves out in the country compared to Toronto" because of a lack of accessible green spaces. In their opinion, downtown Toronto does not have the same quality of natural areas that exhibit the physical seasonal changes they grew up with back home. They have created a small garden outside their apartment, which has helped them feel more connected to the Land, which stresses the importance of having areas for urban Indigenous peoples to grow.

The City of Toronto must create spaces for Indigenous food sovereignty because the act of gardening can strengthen Land relationships like it has for Honey. Furthermore, the creation of Indigenous thirdspaces can (Johnson, 2008, p. 45) "allow the radically disempowered to reconstruct actual spaces in ways that allow them to engage more productively" through acts of refusal. The Sacred Fire has altered the landscape for urban Indigenous peoples, creating a space for community and ceremony that was missing in downtown Toronto.

The City of Toronto has a responsibility to incorporate Indigenous principles into how it plans and develops landscapes because, in my opinion, City planning has failed to maintain and

uphold the spirit of the Treaties that govern this region. The City, however, has been able to create connections through the plants at Allan Gardens for tourists and visitors. The greenhouses elicit similar connections from visitors, such as an anecdote that Alfie shared of an individual encountering a tree from their home country, which brought them great joy to see because it was like having a small piece of their home in a foreign country. Anecdotes like this one are valued by the City to showcase the importance of Allan Gardens, however, the same cannot be said regarding Indigenous Land relationships, as reflected by how their policies are worded, such as "recognizing" Indigenous heritage in the Garden District (Toronto, 2021). Recognition is not the same as a requirement, and a move towards requiring greenspaces to have areas dedicated to Indigenous ways of growing plants would advance reconciliation in the City. The medicine gardens co-created with Indigenous organizations and FOAG are a positive step towards fostering Land connections; however, due to City planning policies, urban Indigenous peoples are unable to make decisions regarding the locations and sizes of these gardens (Friends of Allan Gardens, 2023; Toronto, 2021). Additionally, the proposed conservatory expansion contains plans for greenhouses that contain Arctic and Great Lakes plants alongside an agricultural house that will have culturally relevant plants (Friends of Allan Gardens, 2023); however, there are no specific plans for what 'culturally relevant plants' entails, such as plants that urban Indigenous peoples use traditionally or plants used by other ethnic groups. I strongly encourage FOAG and the City to create a framework that recognizes not only the importance of plant medicines, but also the need for urban Indigenous peoples to access and use them. The proposed conservatory expansion must incorporate Indigenous decision-making to work towards meeting the 94 actions (Canada, 2015) outlined in the TRC report.

As a thirdspace, the Sacred Fire is an example of Indigenous urbanism and resurgence for urban Indigenous peoples to create a place for community, ceremony, and self-determination. Indigenous thirdspaces are not intangible because, as Johnson (2008) asserts, "the evidence of the exercise of indigenous self-determination can be seen on the landscape of the specific places in which it is exercised" (Johnson, 2008, p. 46). The Sacred Fire and surrounding cultural space is that evidence, and in my opinion, cannot be confused or misinterpreted with anything other than an Indigenous space of resurgence borne from acts of refusal and resistance. Johnson (2008, p. 46) provides examples in Aotearoa of similar spaces where Māori have exercised their self-determination that are "grounded in the local politics and history of the place", such as the

protection of a Māori schoolhouse from closure and the guardianship of Whāingaroa (Raglan Harbour) from erosion. As with the urban Indigenous peoples at the Allan Gardens Sacred Fire, who were requested by the City of Toronto to apply for fire permits, the district council requested that Māori activists and elders guarding Whāingaroa follow the resource consent process. The Māori community's refusal helped preserve the beach, local marae (Māori meeting hall), and houses. By exercising their self-determination, both the Māori community and Allan Gardens' urban Indigenous peoples have created a thirdspace that challenges the settler state's sovereignty.

6.2 Theme 2: Transitory Nature of Allan Gardens Through Physical Design Elements

Honey noted that Allan Gardens does not feel like a place to sit and rest, as its physical design elements, including seating, lighting, and pathways, do not convey a sense of rest or leisure. As a downtown park, the need for green spaces is even more important because residents may not have access to high-quality natural areas like the ravine systems connected to the Don River. The seating in the park does not convey comfort (Figure 1), and Honey has noticed that people mostly walk through Allan Gardens to their destination. Having less aggressive architecture would greatly benefit the park. As shown in Figure 1, seating is limited to spaced-out benches and boulders that are uncomfortable to sit on. Furthermore, the proposed changes to Allan Gardens by FOAG will create more community spaces and seating, which could alleviate the perception of Allan Gardens as a transitory space.

FOAG's goal is to modify the area north of the Children's Conservatory to create space for future farmers' markets and programs that benefit park visitors. However, I do not see how the Indigenous peoples at Allan Gardens have been consulted about the proposed changes, or whether the design will negatively impact the unhoused population that lives at the park. The unhoused population continues to experience state-sanctioned violence, and while certain Garden District residents may view unhoused people as a nuisance, this does not justify repeated evictions without addressing the underlying reasons. Honey stated that they are part of a community response team that aims to address how unhoused people at Allan Gardens are treated during evictions, such as ensuring they are not separated from their belongings. Furthermore, they aim to reduce violent

interactions with City officials and police by de-escalating the tensions that arise from park eviction methods. They also provide supplies for unhoused and Indigenous peoples in the Garden District, a role that FOAG takes on as well by donating fresh produce from the Teaching Garden to local food banks. I strongly believe that the City of Toronto has a responsibility towards unhoused people by providing necessary supports, such as food and shelter. These services are not being fully met by non-governmental organizations. While that may create a sense of community, these organizations should not be stepping in to fill the gaps that the City's social services have failed to address.

6.3 Theme 3: Heterotopia

From a Western perspective, Allan Gardens and the Sacred Fire site are heterotopias because they embody multiple contradictions. For example, the microcosm of plants in the greenhouses comprises species from large geographical regions, all contained within individual greenhouses. The farmer's market held by FOAG, which could be seen as a "heterochronie," drawing on Foucault's (2019) concept, occurs within a specific time and creates breaks or gaps in time. Furthermore, as Foucault states, every culture has heterotopias, and I find this concept interesting when applying it to the Sacred Fire and the Allan Gardens Conservatory because heterotopias act as mirrors that reflect society's values. For example, the non-Indigenous Garden District residents view the Sacred Fire site as unsightly, according to Rusty. This perception of an Indigenous ceremonial space differs from how urban Indigenous peoples may view the space, for example, as an Indigenous resurgence in Toronto. Additionally, heterotopias provide a contrast by creating spaces that expose how the Sacred Fire is not designed in a Western style and is perceived as unsightly. The Sacred Fire also has protocols for entry, whereas the Conservatory is open to the public seven days a week. Both spaces occupy places that are understood by City planning and Western society to be within the public realm, and this contradiction is necessary as a form of resistance because Allan Gardens is Indigenous Land. I believe non-Indigenous peoples can benefit from the continual reminder that this Land has never been surrendered. As Johnson (2006, p. 84) states, "heterotopias draw us out of ourselves in peculiar ways; they display and inaugurate a difference and challenge the space in which we may feel at home", and they are an attempt to

think about the creation of space and power relations differently by offering alternative paths for the production of spaces.

6.4 Theme 4: Going Beyond Placemaking

During my interview, Alfie noted that the City needs to employ Indigenous gardeners and create frameworks that centre Indigenous landscape design. He added that planners need to understand Indigenous perspectives on the landscape and learn to love the landscapes they work on, rather than viewing them as mere plots or features on a map. For example, Alfie has worked on an Indigenous plant and tree naming project at Allan Gardens' Children's Conservatory and Teaching Gardens. The project aims to share Indigenous teachings from a Cayuga Elder about plants found at Allan Gardens. By sharing stories and cultures, FOAG is supporting Indigenous resurgence in the Garden District, aligning with the TRC's Calls to Action on language and culture, which call for their recognition and incorporation into Canadian society. This project creates an important space in downtown Toronto where urban Indigenous peoples can feel represented and continue to reclaim their culture by engaging with it.

The City planning policy documents I reviewed in the policy review section did not include design goals for incorporating Indigenous designs into the Allan Gardens landscape and, more broadly, the City of Toronto. The policies mentioned recognition of Indigenous cultural heritage through (Toronto, 2021, p. 95) "interpretive storytelling of Indigenous heritage and incorporation of Indigenous imagery and symbolism in interpretive design". Furthermore, the City has defined heritage interpretation as including various forms, including (2021, p. 95) "the design of site and landscape plans", which does not appear to apply to Indigenous contributions to the design of sites and landscape plans. By including urban Indigenous peoples in landscape plans for Allan Gardens, the City can work towards creating urban spaces that reflect contemporary Indigenous Land relationships. To not be assimilated into the Canadian settler-state Urban Indigenous peoples must continue to be as Indigenous as possible because living Indigenously is an act of refusal.

The City of Toronto plans to create Indigenous placemaking and placekeeping opportunities throughout the city. However, when I asked Rusty whether there were plans to create new policies and similar pilot projects like the one that legitimized the Sacred Fire, he stated, "I

don't know if the City needs to have more policies that have to do with that; I feel that, when we're faced with Sacred Fire, to choose to work with it rather than to push it away is a political choice. They were set up under Tory, a more conservative mayor, and they remained standing." As a City employee, his perspectives are more progressive than those of other City staff I have interacted with, based on my experience both as a private citizen and as a former City employee. However, Rusty's role within the City indicates how decision-makers perceive the success of placemaking projects within Western standards. In my opinion, the Sacred Fire pilot project was cancelled, and similar projects will not be created, because the urban Indigenous peoples at Allan Gardens exercised their right to self-govern. City planning should not decide how a sacred site is planned based on Western design and aesthetic standards, regardless of non-Indigenous residents' complaints, and Indigenous planning must be done by Indigenous peoples. This refusal to be governed by City authorities is an act of resurgence and has created an Indigenous urban space based on their principles and teachings.

6.5 Theme 5: Moving Towards a Different Governance Framework

Moving towards an alternative governance framework, such as biculturalism or binationalism, would recognize the relationship between Indigenous nations and settler groups. Indigenous peoples would be recognized as partners with colonizers in the exercise of their rights within settler-states (Johnson, 2008). Honey stated that Indigenous thought is incompatible with Western epistemologies because they do not share similar teachings. They elaborated that, to their knowledge, Western cultures do not have stories like the Cree teachings on greed and the importance of being in reciprocity with the Land. Furthermore, Honey stated that the two cultures simply cannot coexist because their approaches to Land relationships are too different. Western governance frameworks continue to rely on individual rights, and collective or communal rights do not have a parallel to individual rights (Johnson, 2008). That is why the City of Toronto's governance framework does not allow Indigenous peoples to fully express their Treaty and inherent rights, because the policies do not reflect Indigenous worldviews and principles. As Johnson (2008, p. 29) states, "Indigenous groups continue to demand greater recognition not only of *sui generis* claims to land and resources but also to the acceptance of indigenous philosophies and perspectives in the management of land and resources". The urban Indigenous peoples at the

Sacred Fire continue to rely on acts of refusal to assert their sovereignty within a settler-state because that has been an effective method to enact policy change.

The City still has further to go to ensure that Indigenous peoples can assert their rights in meaningful ways. As Rusty stated, "Indigenous rights, Indigenous peoples policy-wise, are the jurisdiction of the Federal government, first and foremost. That's constitutionally decided to be that way because they have […] which is a relatively smart thing to do because land use is the first and foremost done by the province. […] the province needed their land and it grow with their land [sic]. They consumed more and more territory." Rusty's view on who is responsible for Indigenous matters indicates that the people who work for the City do not truly understand that we are all Treaty people, and as such we all have responsibilities to uphold treaties like the Two Row Wampum. The Two Row Wampum (Guswhenta), as I understand it, is about non-interference between Indigenous and European ways of life. Furthermore, Guswhenta explains that both parties should (Koleszar-Green, 2019, p. 169) "come together with Peace, Friendship and Mutual Respect". Koleszar-Green (2019, p. 173) also writes, "the current Canadian state has created policies and laws that contravene the teachings of Guswhenta; further, colonial histories and the resulting racisms all need to be acknowledged. Such acknowledgement does not erase the complexities of Guests' responsibilities." That is why Toronto must consider a new governance framework that does not contravene the teachings of Guswhenta. A bicultural/binational governance framework has been more successful in Aotearoa than in Canada because of the Treaties signed with Māori peoples, which are similar to Guswhenta. These governance approaches could be strengthened by improving cultural competency training for City staff, as Rusty noted that City training is inadequate and "goes in one ear and out the other." The City of Toronto must also become comfortable with giving up control. Alfie suggested the City could start by relinquishing control over landscape planning at Allan Gardens. To clarify what giving up control might entail, Alfie asked, "what would an Indigenous landscape look like?" Furthermore, Alfie supports what I describe as Indigenous urbanism and resurgence in the City, especially at Allan Gardens, while Rusty said Indigenous principles should not, or could not, be incorporated into City planning because other constituents' needs are greater, as urban Indigenous populations represent a small percentage of the Garden District.

In my opinion (drawing on Johnson (2008), a binational or bicultural governance framework could support urban Indigenous self-determination, for example, through a separate-but-equal approach or parallel institutions. A binational framework can be enacted locally rather than waiting for national governments to figure it out. Aotearoa offers examples of how biculturalism or binationalism has advanced Māori self-determination. Johnson (2008, p. 37) argues that "the creation of a bicultural society requires the participation of both Māori and Pākehā at the individual, community, and national levels." Johnson (2008) identifies recognition of the long-term economic and cultural benefits of full participation in government processes as the first step toward becoming bicultural. Moreover, the key concepts that support the development of bicultural competence are (1) recognition, (2) respect, and (3) reciprocity. City of Toronto policies already recognize Indigenous heritage and histories; however, as noted in Section 2.0, Literature and Policy Review, recognition of Indigenous epistemology alone is insufficient. Non-Indigenous policymakers and planners must (Johnson, 2008, p. 38) "acknowledge and relinquish cultural and intellectual superiority", and Indigenous people must be represented as active participants and reflected in the cityscape. Furthermore, recognition accepts that Indigenous ontologies exist separately from Western knowledge, and respect acknowledges Indigenous ontologies as equal to Western knowledge.

Respect is one of the responsibilities of Guswhenta, and as Smith (2022, p. 137) states, "through respect the place of everyone and everything in the universe is kept in balance and harmony". As an Indigenous person, I do not struggle to understand and accept that animals, rocks, insects, and everything in between possess a spirit and should be treated with respect, which influences how I understand resource management. However, I can also understand Western cosmologies, epistemologies, and ontologies, and in my opinion, if other Indigenous peoples, like myself, can learn and respect these differences, non-Indigenous peoples can at least afford us the same respect. Along with recognition and respect comes reciprocity, which means relationships are balanced. Wilson (2008, p. 79) states, "without this reciprocity, one side of the relationship may gain power and substance at the expense of the other." In Western societies, the commitment to sharing extends well beyond what is expected. As Elliot (2018, p. 73) states, "barriers to reciprocity are found not only in the ways that settlers imagine and speak about the social world but also how they typically behave and orient themselves within it." The Sacred Fire at Allan Gardens is about being in a reciprocal relationship with the Land. The City of Toronto has to

understand and embody these three key concepts to create a bicultural governance framework that allows for spaces for Indigenous peoples' resurgence, because such spaces (Elliott, 2018, p. 73) "are structured not on but for the principle of reciprocity".

6.6 Theme 6: Contentions and Frictions

The Sacred Fire has non-Indigenous support from organizations like FOAG; however, individual support from Garden District residents can be tenuous at times. For example, Rusty mentioned complaints about the Sacred Fire ranging from it being unsightly to noise by-laws. By-laws are usually about regulating land use; however, nuisance by-laws are designed to protect property. Dorries (2009, p. 73) explains nuisance by-laws as "a public nuisance is an 'unreasonable interference with the public's interests in questions of health, safety, morality, comfort of convenience'". The nuisance by-laws used by the City against the Sacred Fire have placed property at the centre of the issue. The City has a responsibility to protect property, but that appears to be at the expense of how the Sacred Fire is governed. Further, I learned from Rusty that the City councillor's office was hoping to secure additional funding for the Sacred Fire to "beautify the space to make it more aesthetic" due to the complaints; however, I question whether the people at the Sacred Fire will have Western aesthetic standards forced on them, or whether they will be able to apply the funds according to their standards and needs. As the Sacred Fire site at Allan Gardens has been legitimized by city planning, other urban Indigenous peoples cannot create other Sacred Fire sites. For example, Honey mentioned that the police and fire departments have been called on them when they held a Sacred Fire on the east side of the park. Additionally, the Sacred Fire site at Allan Gardens has restricted access by the Fire Keepers, which has led to any other Sacred Fire being deemed illegitimate, even when it fills a community need for ceremony. City planning must recognize that ceremonies cannot wait for bureaucracy, nor should urban Indigenous peoples have to fill out a form to hold ceremonies.

7.0 Conclusion

In this paper, I have described the Sacred Fire at Allan Gardens as an example of Indigenous resurgence and a site of Indigenous self-determination and sovereignty through various acts of

refusal and placemaking in partnership with FOAG and other organizations. I now have a working understanding of how Indigenous peoples plan in urban settings, drawing upon the concepts of thirdspace and heterotopia. In undertaking this research, I need to cultivate my own urban Indigenous research paradigm through an iterative process of reviewing scholarly literature and literature from policy and practice, interviews, and my own experience over the course of my graduate program.

The City of Toronto has begun to recognize the importance of involving urban Indigenous peoples in City planning for various reasons, including the adoption of UNDRIP articles, the incorporation of the Calls to Action report into policy development, and the acknowledgment that acts of refusal by urban Indigenous peoples are expressions of their self-determination and sovereignty. However, more work remains, such as requiring Indigenous cultural competencies for all planners who wish to work on Indigenous Land. Furthermore, Canadian governance structures must begin to move towards a binational framework without interference from the Crown, as Indigenous peoples have always known how to govern their own Nations and peoples. Everyone must accept that they are a Treaty person and that responsibilities are expected of them; Koleszar-Green (2019) and other scholars have written extensively on Guest responsibilities. Planners must recognize that Western planning practices do not have all the answers and are not the only methods to successfully plan for future generations, especially when those practices and processes continue to perpetuate colonial harms onto Indigenous peoples. Areas for further research that I could not explore within the scope of this Major Research Project include the role that Indigenous women and 2-Spirit peoples play in decision-making as part of their respective communities in downtown Toronto.

Urban Indigenous peoples use acts of refusal to compel municipal governments, such as the City of Toronto, to amend their by-laws to acknowledge Indigenous Land relationships, such as the Sacred Fire. Acts of refusal are also a way for Indigenous peoples to assert their sovereignty when governance systems have repeatedly failed to work respectfully towards meeting their needs because of differing worldviews on Land and ownership. Although the City of Toronto has begun to include Indigenous peoples in decision-making, it still regards them as mere stakeholders rather than equal partners. This shortcoming is reflected in its policy language, which does not require the implementation and incorporation of Indigenous principles beyond recognition. Non-

governmental organizations have stepped up to incorporate Indigenous principles into their processes, such as FOAG hosting cultural events and ceremonies in the Children's Conservatory. However, the City has not created similar placemaking and placekeeping efforts in the Garden District. I remain, however, hopeful that Indigenous peoples will be represented as more than just stakeholders in urban planning, but as active participants in a binational or bicultural governance framework.

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Appendix A – Interview Questions and Demographic Questions

Demographic questions:

1. Do you identify as FNMI (First Nation, Metis, and Inuit) or Indigenous to Turtle Island (North America)?

Interview Questions:

1. Do you experience being Indigenous in an urban neighbourhood like Allan Gardens? If so, can you tell me more about your experience?
2. In what ways are you able to connect with and practice your culture while living in Toronto?
3. What roles do land and food play if any in your cultural practices, and how are those affected in an urban setting?
4. Are there organizations, community groups, or individuals in Toronto that help sustain Indigenous cultural practices?
5. What kinds of spaces or resources would help you feel more supported in practicing your culture in the City?
6. How does the City incorporate Indigenous voices within the Garden District?
7. How can the City ensure that Indigenous voices and leadership are respected and prioritized in planning decisions, such as at Allan Gardens?
8. Is there anything else that you would like to talk about or other questions that I should be asking?

Proposed Interview Questions for Friends of Allan Gardens non-Indigenous staff/City Planner have been modified; however the proposed questions seek to address similar concepts:

1. How do people experience being Indigenous at Allan Gardens?
2. What ways are Indigenous people able to connect with and practice their culture at Allan Gardens?
3. How does FOAG/City help sustain Indigenous cultural practices?
4. What roles do land and food play if any in cultural practices at Allan Gardens?

5. What opportunities exist for Indigenous peoples that make them feel supported in maintaining their cultural practices?
6. Can you comment on the City's current approaches to Indigenous planning?
7. How do you think the City could better ensure that Indigenous voices and leadership are respected and prioritized in planning decisions, such as at Allan Gardens?
8. What challenges or conflicts do you perceive?
9. What's next for FOAG/City with respect to Allan Gardens or more broadly? Is there anything else that you think I should know?

Appendix B – Excerpts from the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Articles

Article 8

1. Indigenous peoples and individuals have the right not to be subjected to forced assimilation or destruction of their culture.

2. States shall provide effective mechanisms for prevention of, and redress for:

(a) Any action which has the aim or effect of depriving them of their integrity as distinct peoples, or of their cultural values or ethnic identities;

(b) Any action which has the aim or effect of dispossessing them of their lands, territories or resources;

Article 11

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to practise and revitalize their cultural traditions and customs. This includes the right to maintain, protect and develop the past, present and future manifestations of their cultures, such as archaeological and historical sites, artefacts, designs, ceremonies, technologies and visual and performing arts and literature.

2. States shall provide redress through effective mechanisms, which may include restitution, developed in conjunction with indigenous peoples, with respect to their cultural, intellectual, religious and spiritual property taken without their free, prior and informed consent or in violation of their laws, traditions and customs.

Article 12

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to manifest, practise, develop and teach their spiritual and religious traditions, customs and ceremonies; the right to maintain, protect, and have access in privacy to their religious and cultural sites; the right to the use and control of their ceremonial objects; and the right to the repatriation of their human remains.

2. States shall seek to enable the access and/or repatriation of ceremonial objects and human remains in their possession through fair, transparent and effective mechanisms developed in conjunction with Indigenous peoples concerned.

Article 18

Indigenous peoples have the right to participate in decision-making in matters which would affect their rights, through representatives chosen by themselves in accordance with their own procedures, as well as to maintain and develop their own indigenous decision-making institutions.

Article 25

Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain and strengthen their distinctive spiritual relationship with their traditionally owned or otherwise occupied and used lands, territories, waters and coastal seas and other resources and to uphold their responsibilities to future generations in this regard.

Article 26

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to the lands, territories and resources which they have traditionally owned, occupied or otherwise used or acquired.

2. Indigenous peoples have the right to own, use, develop and control the lands, territories and resources that they possess by reason of traditional ownership or other traditional occupation or use, as well as those which they have otherwise acquired.

3. States shall give legal recognition and protection to these lands, territories and resources. Such recognition shall be conducted with due respect to the customs, traditions and land tenure systems of the Indigenous peoples concerned.

Article 27

States shall establish and implement, in conjunction with Indigenous peoples concerned, a fair, independent, impartial, open and transparent process, giving due recognition to Indigenous peoples' laws, traditions, customs and land tenure systems, to recognize and adjudicate the rights of Indigenous peoples pertaining to their lands, territories and resources, including those which

were traditionally owned or otherwise occupied or used. Indigenous peoples shall have the right to participate in this process.

Article 28

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to redress, by means that can include restitution or, when this is not possible, just, fair and equitable compensation, for the lands, territories and resources which they have traditionally owned or otherwise occupied or used, and which have been confiscated, taken, occupied, used or damaged without their free, prior and informed consent.

2. Unless otherwise freely agreed upon by the peoples concerned, compensation shall take the form of lands, territories and resources equal in quality, size and legal status or of monetary compensation or other appropriate redress.

Article 29

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to the conservation and protection of the environment and the productive capacity of their lands or territories and resources. States shall establish and implement assistance programmes for Indigenous peoples for such conservation and protection, without discrimination.

2. States shall take effective measures to ensure that no storage or disposal of hazardous materials shall take place in the lands or territories of Indigenous peoples without their free, prior and informed consent.

3. States shall also take effective measures to ensure, as needed, that programmes for monitoring, maintaining and restoring the health of Indigenous peoples, as developed and implemented by the peoples affected by such materials, are duly implemented.

Appendix C – Excerpts from the *Provincial Planning Statement* Policies

4.6 Cultural heritage and archaeology

1. Protected heritage property, which may contain built heritage resources or cultural heritage landscapes, shall be conserved (p. 28)

2. Planning authorities shall not permit development and site alteration on lands containing archaeological resources or areas of archaeological potential unless the significant archaeological resources have been conserved (p. 28).

4. Planning authorities are encouraged to develop and implement:

a) archaeological management plans for conserving archaeological resources; and
b) proactive strategies for conserving significant heritage resources and cultural heritage landscapes (p. 28).

5. Planning authorities shall engage early with Indigenous communities and ensure their interests are considered when identifying, protecting and managing archaeological resources, built heritage resources and cultural heritage landscapes (p. 28).

Chapter 6: Implementation and Interpretation

6.1 General Policies for Implementation and Interpretation

2. The *Provincial Planning Statement* shall be implemented in a manner that is consistent with the recognition and affirmation of existing Aboriginal and treaty rights in section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982 (p. 32).

3. The *Provincial Planning Statement* shall be implemented in a manner that is consistent with *Ontario Human Rights Code* and the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (p. 32).

9. To assess progress on implementation of the *Provincial Planning Statement*, the Province may: a) identify key indicators to measure the outcomes, relevance and efficiency of the policies in the Provincial Planning Statement in consultation with municipalities, Indigenous communities, other public bodies and stakeholders (p. 33);

6.2 Coordination

1. A coordinated, integrated and comprehensive approach should be used when dealing with planning matters within municipalities, across lower, single and/or upper-tier municipal boundaries, and with other orders of government, agencies, boards, and Service Managers including:

c) managing natural heritage, water, agricultural, mineral, and cultural heritage and archaeological resources (p. 34)

2. Planning authorities shall undertake early engagement with Indigenous communities and coordinate on land use planning matters to facilitate knowledge-sharing, support consideration of Indigenous interests in land use decision-making and support the identification of potential impacts of decisions on the exercise of Aboriginal or treaty rights (p. 34).

Appendix D – Excerpts from the City of Toronto Official Plan

Chapter One – Toward Reconciliation

1.2 Planning Priorities

"As our city evolves, so must our priorities if we are going to advance reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples and create a city that is accessible, equitable and inclusive." (Toronto, 2026, pp. 1-5)

"Toronto will work with honesty and integrity to create and repair relationships to support truth, justice, and reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples. Toronto will be a city where Indigenous worldviews, cultures, and ways of life are respected and celebrated." (Toronto, 2026, pp. 1-7)

Reconciliation

"It is important to create and repair meaningful, ongoing relationships with Indigenous Peoples, including members of the diverse urban Indigenous community of Toronto as we plan for the future of the city. The Official Plan will help the city advance reconciliation by:

• recognizing the importance of access to land and water and land stewardship to the Indigenous community of Toronto;

• amplifying Indigenous voices in planning processes through respectful, meaningful, and early engagement;

• supporting opportunities for Indigenous prosperity, placemaking, and placekeeping; and

• moving beyond land acknowledgements to create tangible and meaningful action." (Toronto, 2026, p. 1)

2.2.1 Downtown: the heart of Toronto

"The conservation and promotion of cultural heritage resources – of First Nations and Métis communities and of settlers – should guide future planning and investment decisions Downtown." (Toronto, 2026, pp. 2-11)

3.1.1 The Public Realm

"4. Consultation, partnerships and collaboration with Indigenous communities will be encouraged in the planning, design and development of new, expanded or improved streets, parks and open spaces. This may include the celebration and recognition of Indigenous culture and history, along with cultural and natural heritage, through place-making, naming, wayfinding, monuments, interpretive features, public art, partnerships and programing." (Toronto, 2026, pp. 3-3)

Cultural Heritage Landscapes

"43. Potential cultural heritage landscapes will be identified and evaluated to determine their significance and cultural heritage values. Significant cultural heritage landscapes will be included on the Heritage Register and/or designated under either Part IV or Part V of the Ontario Heritage Act." (Toronto, 2026, pp. 3-24)

Appendix E – Excerpts from the Downtown Plan

3.2. Walkable access to a complete range of amenities, services and infrastructure is encouraged to support complete communities, as provided for by this Plan (Toronto, 2026a, p. 4).

3.4. Public spaces are encouraged to be diverse, accessible, flexible, dynamic and safe, supporting year-round public life and setting the stage for daily social interaction and community building, as provided for by this Plan (Toronto, 2026a, p. 4).

3.12. Toronto will be positioned as a global leader in arts and culture. Downtown will support a thriving cultural scene by supporting the retention and expansion of spaces for culture sector employment and will foster art, live music and the film industry (Toronto, 2026a, p. 6).

3.13. Green infrastructure in Downtown will be encouraged to improve air quality, absorb stormwater, minimize the urban heat island, expand biodiversity and improve human health (Toronto, 2026a, p. 7).

4.1. Growth is encouraged within the Downtown, in particular on lands designated Mixed Use Areas 1, Mixed Use Areas 2, Mixed Use Areas 3, Regeneration Areas and Institutional Areas. The highest density of development within the Downtown shall be directed to Mixed Use Areas in close proximity to existing or planned transit stations. Other areas of Downtown will have more modest levels of growth, in keeping with the applicable policies (Toronto, 2026a, p. 8)

7. Parks and Public Realm

7.1.1. provide a diversity of parks distributed throughout Downtown that meets the needs of residents, workers and visitors while also contributing to Toronto's broader system of parks and open spaces(Toronto, 2026a, p. 22).

7.1.3. provide neighbourhood hubs and civic spaces that allow for social interaction, healthy lifestyles and a range of activities(Toronto, 2026a, p. 22).

Objectives for the planning, design and development of parks and the public realm

7.3.2. reinforce historic places, including those places of Indigenous presence previously unrecognized (Toronto, 2026a, p. 23).

7.3.3. celebrate Indigenous histories and recognize cultural and natural heritage through placemaking, naming, wayfinding, monuments, interpretive features, public art, partnerships and programming (Toronto, 2026a, p. 23).

7.3.4. support Indigenous cultural and ceremonial practices through the provision of programmable spaces (Toronto, 2026a, p. 23).

7.3.5. encourage public life through site-specific placemaking and pedestrian amenities that foster social interaction, including but not limited to seating, landscaping, active uses at grade, way-finding, public art and programming (Toronto, 2026a, p. 23)

7.47. Partnerships and collaboration with Indigenous communities will be encouraged in the planning, design and development of parks and the public realm.

8.4.6. reinforce historic public spaces, including those that acknowledge Indigenous cultures and histories.

7.12. Indigenous cultures and histories will be celebrated in the Core Circle, implemented through placemaking and other initiatives led by Indigenous communities in partnership with the City and other stakeholders (Toronto, 2026a, p. 25).

Partnerships

7.47. Partnerships and collaboration with Indigenous communities will be encouraged in the planning, design and development of parks and the public realm (Toronto, 2026a, p. 34).

A Walkable Downtown

8.4.6. reinforce historic public spaces, including those that acknowledge Indigenous cultures and histories (Toronto, 2026a, p. 36).

Retention and Expansion of Cultural Spaces and Cultural Industry

The clustering and co-location of Indigenous cultural organizations will be encouraged (Toronto, 2026a, p. 58).

12.2. Clustering of cultural spaces, including Indigenous cultural organizations, will be supported and encouraged (Toronto, 2026a, p. 58).

12.3. The co-location and/or creation of community hubs for cultural and community spaces, including Indigenous organizations, will be encouraged as part of development where appropriate in Mixed Use Areas 1, Mixed Use Areas 2, Mixed Use Areas 3, Mixed Use Areas 4 and Regeneration Areas (Toronto, 2026a, p. 58).

Interpretation

15.3. Cultural spaces are the physical spaces that present and support arts activities, creative industries, cultural expression and cultural heritage (Toronto, 2026a, p. 67).

Appendix F – Excerpts from the Downtown Parks and Public Realm Plan

"Establish partnerships with Indigenous communities to advance initiatives that celebrate the landscape and Indigenous cultures and histories." (Toronto, 2018, p. 34)

"Establish partnerships with Indigenous communities to realize the Core Circle" (Toronto, 2018, p. 37).

"Imagine portal parks as offering opportunities to unearth lost layers of natural, Indigenous, cultural and industrial heritage" (Toronto, 2018, p. 55)

Now is the time to restore and re-harmonize the ravine landscape, to leverage the dramatic topography and Indigenous cultural heritage landscape for creative placemaking and interpretation (Toronto, 2018, p. 56)

Appendix G – Excerpts from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action

Language and Culture

"14. We call upon the federal government to enact an Aboriginal Languages Act that incorporates the following principles:
i. Aboriginal languages are a fundamental and valued element of Canadian culture and society, and there is an urgency to preserve them.

ii. Aboriginal language rights are reinforced by the Treaties.

iii. The federal government has a responsibility to provide sufficient funds for Aboriginal-language revitalization and preservation.

iv. The preservation, revitalization, and strengthening of Aboriginal languages and cultures are best managed by Aboriginal people and communities.

v. Funding for Aboriginal language initiatives must reflect the diversity of Aboriginal languages." (Canada, 2015, p. 2)

"13. We call upon the federal government to acknowledge that Aboriginal rights include Aboriginal language rights." (Canada, 2015, p. 2)

Health

"20. In order to address the jurisdictional disputes concerning Aboriginal people who do not reside on reserves, we call upon the federal government to recognize, respect, and address the distinct health needs of the Métis, Inuit, and off-reserve Aboriginal peoples." (Canada, 2015, p. 3)

Reconciliation

"43. We call upon federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal governments to fully adopt and implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as the framework for reconciliation." (Canada, 2015, p. 4)

Professional Development and Training for Public Servants

"57. We call upon federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal governments to provide education to public servants on the history of Aboriginal peoples, including the history and legacy of residential schools, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Treaties and Aboriginal rights, Indigenous law, and Aboriginal–Crown relations. This will require skills-based training in intercultural competency, conflict resolution, human rights, and anti-racism." (Canada, 2015, p. 7)