



## MEDIA RELEASE

### CITY OF NEW WESTMINSTER

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### **New Westminster and Tsilhqot'in Nation become Sister Communities with signing of Sister Community Agreement**

New Westminster, BC – On October 15, 2020, the City of New Westminster and the Tsilhqot'in Nation (which is made up of the six communities of Tl'etinqox, ?Esdilagh, Yunešit'in, Tšideldel, Tl'esqox and Xení Gwet'in) became “sister communities” with the virtual signing of a sister community agreement.

The signing of this Sister Community **Memorandum of Agreement**, written both in English and in the Tsilhqot'in language, reflects the commitment of both the City of New Westminster and the Tsilhqot'in Nation to work together and support one another for the enrichment of both communities. It is the culmination of several years of relationship building – including through the 2017 wildfires – and a shared commitment to advance understanding and reconciliation.

This is not the first time the City of New Westminster has entered into a sister city relationship, but it is historic because it marks the first time that the City has formed a sister city relationship with an Indigenous Nation.

This signing follows the ceremony that New Westminster and the Tsilhqot'in Nation co-hosted on July 18, 2019 to commemorate the wrongful trial and hanging of Tsilhqot'in War Chief ?Ahan. In October 1864 Justice Matthew Begbie tried and ordered the execution of five Tsilhqot'in chiefs. The following summer, on July 18, 1865, a sixth, Chief ?Ahan, was tried and executed in New Westminster after being arrested while attempting to negotiate peace in the aftermath of the Chilcotin War. It is believed that Chief ?Ahan is most likely buried in New Westminster. Last year, on July 7, 2019, a Tsilhqot'in delegation joined with City leaders to witness the removal of Judge Begbie's statue from outside the provincial courthouse in New Westminster, on Carnarvon Street in Begbie Square.

“By becoming sister communities with the Tsilhqot'in Nation, we are formalizing an important relationship that we have been building over the past three years and more,” said Mayor Jonathan X. Coté. “There are many past wounds that have been inflicted on this land, by ours and other

governments. We acknowledge these wounds and our role in them, and we are committed to taking concrete steps to address the legacy of colonialism in New Westminster.”

“The City of New Westminster has stood by our Nation to right the wrongs of the past,” said Chief Jimmy Lulua, Interim Vice-Chair for the T̓silhqot̓in National Government. “Together we have demonstrated that government and First Nations can form mutually respectful and progressive relationships that advance the goals of both parties and work to achieve reconciliation for Indigenous peoples. The signing of this Sister Community Agreement makes it official, but the principles of this Sister Community Agreement and the T̓silhqot̓in relationship with the City of New Westminster have been strong for years now. Further, we would like to acknowledge the work of Councillor Chuck Puchmayr, who has led the work of reconciliation with action, not just by words and empty promises. Councillor Chuck Puchmayr has been an ally to our Nation and stood with us to honour our fallen T̓silhqot̓in War Chiefs. Together we pushed for the removal of the Justice Matthew Begbie statue to reconcile a painful legacy of colonization.”

New Westminster City Council has identified reconciliation and the implementation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Action (as they relate to local governments) as key priorities. Through this commitment the city is working in partnership with First Nations to co-develop a reconciliation framework focused on changing the way that New Westminster does business, which will include action plans and processes for reconciling our shared past, present and future. The City has already begun meeting with local First Nations and will continue building these relationships.

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