

April 16, 2024

Mayor and Council
City of Abbotsford

Re: BC Métis Federation Request – Inclusion and Partnership Meeting

Dear Mayor and Council:

My name is Joe Desjarlais, and I am the Director of Research for the BC Metis Federation (BCMF). The BCMF is a provincial Metis representative organization that represents members and several local Metis partner communities throughout BC. We are increasingly concerned about the anti-Metis racism and discrimination that is being expressed across our province, making life difficult and often dangerous for our members. At a time when indigenous history should be celebrated, Metis in BC live in fear because of the ignorance of our lived-experience and the misunderstanding of our history. Few people are aware of the Metis self-determining communities existing in the Pacific Northwest since as early as 1780, the result of both Prairie diaspora and those developed within the PNW itself. Sadly, this erasure did not happen by chance. Despite playing a key role in the growth of many cities, towns, and hamlets across the province for the past 150 years, Metis communities experienced systemic racism and discrimination that has resulted in dispossession, cultural loss, and devastating relational fractures.

Nevertheless, Metis people, often hiding in plain sight, have long-standing history and memory that remains and deserves to be represented. For example, my family history is in Maillardville, an early settlement that included a historic Metis community with extensive Metis kinship networks. Our research at the BCMF shows that there were many such self-determining Metis kinship networks/communities existing on the land and accessing resources alongside of First Nations before effective Crown control (<https://www.metisinbc.ca/>). In 2013, the Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples report recommended that, considering the evolving understanding of the Métis and their relationship to the Crown in BC, Métis organizations and communities should be empowered to identify relevant historical documentation, including documents held by all levels of government, and to make this data readily accessible. In addition, the report proposes an appropriately resourced research program to support Métis communities and organizations in gathering information on the development of their historic communities, including written documentation and oral histories.

In an age of reconciliation, we can no longer ignore or continue to erase Metis history and memory, a situation that has long contributed to ignorance and denialism. In fact, many municipalities contributed to dispossession when they used bylaws to evict and displace mixed ancestry “squatters” from within city boundaries. City governments have a fiduciary obligation to help all Métis people in BC recover this history, repatriate their kinship networks, and reconstitute the self-determining, self-sufficient communities that were destroyed. It is no longer appropriate to continue 150 years of denial, discrimination, and dispossession; it is time to open a generous space within which we can explore our agency and our shared past. BCMF would like to combat ignorance and hatred by creating meaningful

relationships between local Métis communities and the city galleries, libraries, archives, and museums that have excluded them.

It is our view that the future and success of Métis in BC rests on creating knowledge partnerships. To that end, the BC Metis Federation has a collaborative agreement with Library and Archives Canada (<https://bcmetis.com/news/bcmf-is-pleased-to-announce-a-letter-of-support-from-library-and-archives-canada/>), one of the most powerful historical institutions in the country. This partnership signals a move towards a shared history that is told by and for Métis peoples, and an affiliation that links research and knowledge to capacity building, cultural wellbeing, and financial sustainability. It is a model that can be used to guide relationships wherever Métis knowledge is held, including in your own government documents, archive, and museum. Together we can uncover and share Métis stories so that our history can come into conversation with First Nations, settler, and other history.

BCMF representatives request a meeting with representatives of The City of Abbotsford to discuss how we can create a mutually beneficial knowledge partnership. We invite you to come into conversation with Métis people in your jurisdiction and to fund research on Métis history and memory that will help us address the systemic barriers and prejudice that have limited Métis voices, perspectives, and lifeways. As eminent BC historian Jean Barman stated: “governments are, by definition, bound to uphold the law. As Powley reminds us, “the difficulty of identifying members of the Métis community must not be exaggerated as a basis for defeating their rights under the Constitution of Canada.””

For more information about the BC Metis Federation go to www.BCMetis.com

To view an overview video about the BC Metis Federation go to: [New Video Showcases the Heart and Soul of the BC Métis Federation - BC Métis Federation \(bcmetis.com\)](#)

Marci,



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cc BC Métis Federation Board of Directors
BC Métis Federation Partner Communities