

Dufferin County to officially recognize Indigenous history with land acknowledgment

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Growing up in Dufferin County in the 1980s, Debbie Sipkema, can remember being taught the history of Orangeville.

"They were trying to get people to go and visit the area so they wanted us to have the ability to give them the history, but like everywhere else the history gets missed, with important pieces," said Sipkema, chair and co-founder of Dufferin County Cultural Resource Circle (DCCRC).

The history she recalls learning was that of Orange Lawrence and how he found "this environment where nobody could have possibly lived". The missing important piece of history she alludes to is that of the Indigenous Peoples who resided here.

Dufferin County, during their meeting on Thursday (Sept. 10), had a presentation of its newly drafted land acknowledgment, which will be read at the beginning of each County Council meeting from now on.

It's a step forward toward reconciliation Sipkema says adding, "considering for a long, long time the County all but filed their Indigenous connection under I for ignore."

The recommended statement approved at the meeting acknowledges the traditional territory and ancestral land, where Dufferin County resides, of the Tionontati (Petun), Attawandaron (Neutral), Haudenosaunee (Six Nations), and Anishinaabe peoples.

"Historically Dufferin County was occupied by different First Nations groups at various times, one group essentially displacing another," said Julie McNevin, education programmer at Museum of Dufferin.

With the land acknowledgment McNevin says that emphasis is placed on ally ship, celebrating the history and culture, and the relationship Indigenous People had and still have with the land.

"By engaging in dialogue, listening and learning we are committing to the key cornerstones of ally ship," McNevin says.

The statement also acknowledges that Dufferin County resides on treaty lands including the Haldimand Deed of 1784, and two of the Williams Treaties of 1818 (Treaty 18: the Nottawasaga Purchase and 19: the Adjetance Treaty).

While the statement, which was created with the help of Indigenous consultants, is described by McNevin as "comprehensive and inclusive", Debbie Sipkema adds that she would like to see some of the history and information expanded on.

Aside from the land acknowledgment Sipkema notes that the learning on why land acknowledgements are needed, is a big part that needs to be understood.

Dufferin County has left the land acknowledgment as a "living document" and the DCCRC Sipkema said is planning to come forward with recommendations to further the statement after consulting elders in the nine communities within Dufferin.

The County will start reading the acknowledgment at its next meeting on Oct. 8.