



DISTRICT OF SQUAMISH

ta wanáxw sníchim **The True Words Report**

September 30, 2026

Photo: Squamish Nation

Acknowledgment

The District of Squamish is located on the unceded traditional territory of the Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish Nation). We offer gratitude to the Skwxwú7mesh People who have lived on these lands since time immemorial.

We recognize the Skwxwú7mesh People that contributed to this report – Skwxwú7mesh Elders, Skwxwú7mesh Elected Officials, the Knowledge Keepers who were interviewed, the Squamish Valley Committee Advisory Group, and Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw staff. We thank you for your wisdom, guidance and knowledge.

Preamble to the Formal Apology

We acknowledge that the content of this apology may evoke feelings of hurt, grief or trauma for Squamish Nation people. These are your lived experiences and the pain that has been passed down through families over many generations.

We recognize that these words may be difficult to hear, and we encourage you to care for your well-being in a way that feels right for you.

We express deep gratitude to the Squamish Nation elders and knowledge keepers who have shared your stories, teachings and truth as part of this work. Your courage has helped us ground this apology in honesty and accountability.

We are learning from the Squamish Nation about the Seven Generation approach and have used this principle to guide the writing of this apology. We know that the actions we take today must positively shape the lives of generations to come. We understand that reconciliation begins—and is always grounded—in Truth.

We appreciate and thank the Squamish Nation Language Commission for the gifted name for this work: ta wanáwx sníchim - True Words.

The name ta wanáwx sníchim exemplifies the goals of this work:

- Bringing truth to light
- Moving forward
- Working to understand and address the harms caused in the past
- Building relationships

We humbly thank the Squamish Nation for your meaningful guidance throughout this important work, and for the wisdom shared that continues to lead us forward.

Photo: Squamish Nation

The Formal Apology

The Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh
People have been
here from time
immemorial—on this
land that lives within
you—thousands of
years before maps,
borders or towns.

We realize the harms inflicted on generations of the Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh People by people, systems and policies, and we recognize that we are among the people who benefitted from those systems and policies.

We understand colonial settlement disrupted the Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh People’s sacred relationship with these lands, and denied the Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh People access to these places.

We know that colonization negatively impacted the economic development of the Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh People. We understand that colonization undermined Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh People’s feelings of truth, security, purpose and belonging.

When we speak about colonization, truth and reconciliation, and healing, we are speaking about people and their lived experiences.

Words alone are not enough to effect lasting change—it is one important part of making amends.

We are here to stand up and correct our path.

This work serves as recognition and affirmation of Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh People’s experiences, including actions where harm was caused by the District.

Our municipal government exists because of the colonization and attempted assimilation of Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh People—*impacts that continue to be felt today.*

The District of Squamish, together with the Squamish Nation, has been documenting the historical relationship between the two governments, and the truths that have been revealed are clear.

Over time, District of Squamish actions have negatively impacted the Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh People: their well-being, culture, economy, governance and full enjoyment of Squamish rights and title.

The District of Squamish recognizes the racism and discrimination experienced by Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh People, the loss of Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh language and culture, and the lack of respect shown for the sacredness of the lands and waters.

We admit this hurt. We are here to show respect, build trust and support the well-being of the Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh People.

To all Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh People: we are sorry. We are sorry for the harms that you, your families, your communities and your ancestors have experienced, and you continue to experience.

This is the legacy we face. We vow to learn from these past harms and to walk alongside you in a better relationship, understanding that each acknowledgement of harm requires that we learn how to move forward in a good way with you.

We will continue to deepen our understanding of your history and commit ourselves to building a better future together.

We commit to strengthening the relationship with you and continuing on this shared path of reconciliation.

We will work with you to restore your cultural connection to public lands, and honour and uphold your principles, teachings, and stories.

We offer you this apology with good intentions—for a strong future and shared path forward, together.

Introduction

During the 100th anniversary of Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh Úxwumixw's amalgamation, the District of Squamish (The District) and Squamish Nation signed the wa iyím ta Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh (Squamish Strong) Protocol Agreement on July 17, 2023. Building on this work, on July 22, 2025, the two governments signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). The MOU supports the District and Squamish Nation in advancing truth and reconciliation together. It builds on decades of cooperation, past agreements and shared projects, and provides a framework for setting shared priorities, developing agreements and exploring areas of collaboration.

The MOU identifies Six Priority Activities for 2025 to 2028. One of these is a formal apology from the District to the Squamish Nation that acknowledges the impacts of colonization and settlement on Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh People, lands and waters.

This report, ta wanáxw sníchim, supports that Priority Activity. **ta wanáxw sníchim** is a gifted name from Paháyikwup, the Squamish Nation's language commission. The name means "the true words" and was given to the archival and oral history research that is helping shape the District's apology.

This report examines the relationship between the District and Squamish Nation through the review of a sample of District historical records and oral histories of Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh Elders and Knowledge Keepers. It affirms the Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh experience, including the times when the District caused harm.

While the relationship between the two governments has progressed over past decades, the records and oral histories highlight the ways that the District caused or perpetuated harms against Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh People.

Much of what this report describes, reflects the broader patterns of settlement and colonialism in the Squamish Valley, rather than the decisions or actions of any one person or Council. It is important to acknowledge that colonization shaped the conditions in which those decisions were made; and privilege was embedded throughout the systems that developed around them.

Confronting the truth can be difficult. It is a necessary part of reconciliation work, as reconciliation must be grounded in what happened and addressing what those harms have meant.

This report covers part of the history, not all of it. This work represents "a drop in the ocean". There is more to learn, and the District and Squamish Nation are continuing this work together as part of an ongoing truth-telling and reconciliation process.

Approach and Methodology

The District's commitment to reconciliation is grounded in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and the work of the Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

The research was co-created with the Squamish Nation. This approach helped shape the questions, the lenses, the review of findings and the themes that appear in this report.

The Approach

There were three main components in the research process: an archival review of District records; advice from the Squamish Valley Community Advisory Group; and guidance from oral history interviews of Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh People.

Taken together, District's records show examples of government decisions, while oral histories illustrate what those decisions mean to the people who lived with them. A number of additional interviews with District and Squamish Nation staff helped to contextualize some of the information.

The Review

The Village of Squamish was incorporated in 1948, and later the Village amalgamated with the surrounding communities of Brackendale and Mamquam to become the District of Squamish in 1964. With those historical milestones in mind, the review covered records from the 1960s onward. Colonial laws and policies that shaped this relationship prior to the 1960s are not included in the scope for this report.

Approximately 250 District records from the 1960s to present day were reviewed. Records were retrieved using an agreed set of search terms and were then sorted into focus areas. Emerging themes were identified, records were tagged against those themes, and the themes were then refined through informational interviews and and Squamish Valley Community Advisory Group feedback.

The review focused on District records. Squamish Nation archives, provincial records and federal records were outside the scope for this phase. This account draws mainly on one municipality's files rather than more exhaustive records held across different governments. Many District records are not digitized, which further limited what could be searched within the time available.

Municipal records have limitations. They show what was decided, what was written, and how things were done, but they cannot show what those decisions meant for Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh People. Additionally, the records reviewed were only a sample of archives. The review was not meant to be exhaustive, but rather a way to identify some of the dynamics that existed between the two governments, and the ways in which harms may have been caused.





Photo: Mark Edwards

Squamish Valley Community Advisory Group

The Squamish Valley Community Advisory Group was one of the main ways Squamish Nation informed the research. The Advisory Group includes a diversity of representatives from villages across the Squamish Valley. The group provided guidance at key touchpoints during the research process including validating the oral history questions and provided feedback as the emerging themes were refined.

Oral History Interviews

A Skwxwú7mesh researcher led the oral history interviews. Questions were co-developed and validated with the Squamish Valley Community Advisory Group. The interviews were culturally informed, and participants were invited to answer questions, share what was in their hearts, and tell stories that were important to them. Consent and trauma-informed care was integrated into the process.

Five long-form interviews were conducted. The interviews brought Skwxwú7mesh experience to the archival review. The oral histories yielded rich information which gave the records fuller context and meaning.

The interviews illustrated how the Skwxwú7mesh People, territory and culture thrived pre-contact and emphasized the significance of spirituality within Skwxwú7mesh culture. They all highlighted the severe impacts that colonial settlement had on their way of life; way of being. The interviewees emphasized generational thinking and highlighted the four feelings – trust, security, purpose, belonging- as outlined in the [2050 Generational Plan](#) as guiding priorities for the Squamish Nation.

Lenses

The research was shaped by the questions asked by the researchers and the perspectives used to interpret them. As a framework, a series of lenses guided this work.

One lens was to examine colonization as a system not as a series of separate events. Individual decisions are considered alongside the laws, policies and practices that shaped who held land, who held power, and who made decisions in the Squamish Valley.

The next set of lenses were derived from the principles in the MOU. These principles are values shared by the District and Squamish Nation, and they reflect Skwxwú7mesh ways of being, decision-making and working together in a good way.

- **chet wa tkwáya7nnitway iy chet wa kwútsut “Listen and engage”:** Approach this work with openness, curiosity, and a willingness to build mutual understanding.
- **chet wa nexwníwen ta nexwníw tl’a skwxwú7mesh “Follow the ways of the Squamish”:** Respect and honour Skwxwú7mesh laws, traditions and leadership.
- **chet wa asch’éwá “Genuinely care”:** Act with compassion, integrity and accountability in all aspects of this relationship.
- **chet wa ta7lt ta snewíyelhcht “Learn the advice of the Squamish”:** Value the teachings, knowledge, and guidance of Skwxwú7mesh Elders and community.
- **wa nelhnilhtway ta uxwumixw, “The people go through it together”:** Move forward in partnership, with shared responsibility and collective commitment.
- **chet wa yuus ta stitúyntsam “Protect the rights and title of the Squamish”:** Centre Indigenous rights and uphold the inherent title of Skwxwú7mesh People.

Skwxwú7mesh agency is another important lens. This report is not intended to present Skwxwú7mesh People only through experiences of harm and victimization. The research also looked for advocacy, negotiation, resistance, leadership, and the ways Skwxwú7mesh People continued to build and sustain their community. The records reveal complexities, containing examples of cooperation, individual relationships and advocacy, alongside evidence of harm - all are part of the history.



Photo: Mark Edwards

What We've Learned from the Archival Research and Oral Histories

The archival record and oral history interviews were reviewed separately, then brought together. From that work, key themes emerged. Many overlap and should be read together.

It is critical to note that all the harms to Skwxwú7mesh People derive from the broader overarching theme of systemic colonialism.



Photo: Squamish Nation

Colonialism

The District, as a local government, has been part of colonial systems and has benefited from them, including systems connected to reserves, cultural assimilation, land decisions and local governance.

Skwxwú7mesh People were thriving before colonization. Colonial laws and policies disrupted the ways Skwxwú7mesh People had survived and thrived, and many of those laws were already in place long before the years covered by the District's records. Their impacts carried forward into the period this research examines.

Economic exclusion runs through this history. Skwxwú7mesh People were prevented from participating fully in economic opportunities in the Squamish Valley, and that exclusion cannot be separated from the discrimination described elsewhere in this report. The question of who benefited from resource industries, and who did not, is part of this history.

Many of the structures and decisions from this period were not the District's. The District, however, benefitted from them, through resource extraction, the presence of the railway, and logging settlements, among others. Oral history interviews consistently emphasized the importance of knowing and naming these harms.

The District acknowledges that a number of municipal facilities are operated on former reserve lands, and more broadly on the unceded territories of the Skwxwú7mesh People.

The original reserves in the District were created in 1876. They have been reduced in area over time, largely through the expansion of the railway in the early 1900s. Roads and dikes were built along reserves. Where the District did not build them, the municipality still inherited the impacts that this infrastructure had and still has on reserves and on Squamish Nation Territory in general.



Racism and Discrimination

The oral histories highlighted incidences of Skwxwú7mesh People facing racism and discrimination in their interactions with District representatives. There were reports that Squamish Nation involvement in projects were not prioritized in the past and that there needed to be more comprehensive cultural training around Indigenous history and issues.

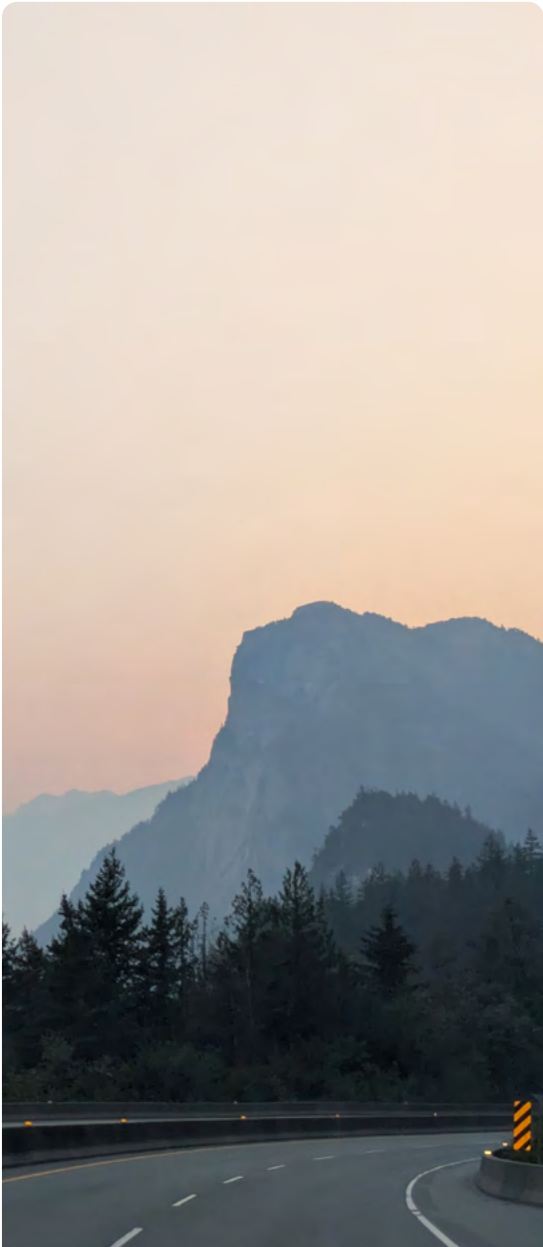
The records also indicated that incidents of discrimination may have occurred, including past disregard for Squamish Nation Rights and Title and a lack of acknowledgement of the Squamish Nation as a government. Oral history interviews point to a lack of educational opportunities and suggested that trainings or more information boards throughout the community to educate the wider community should be considered.

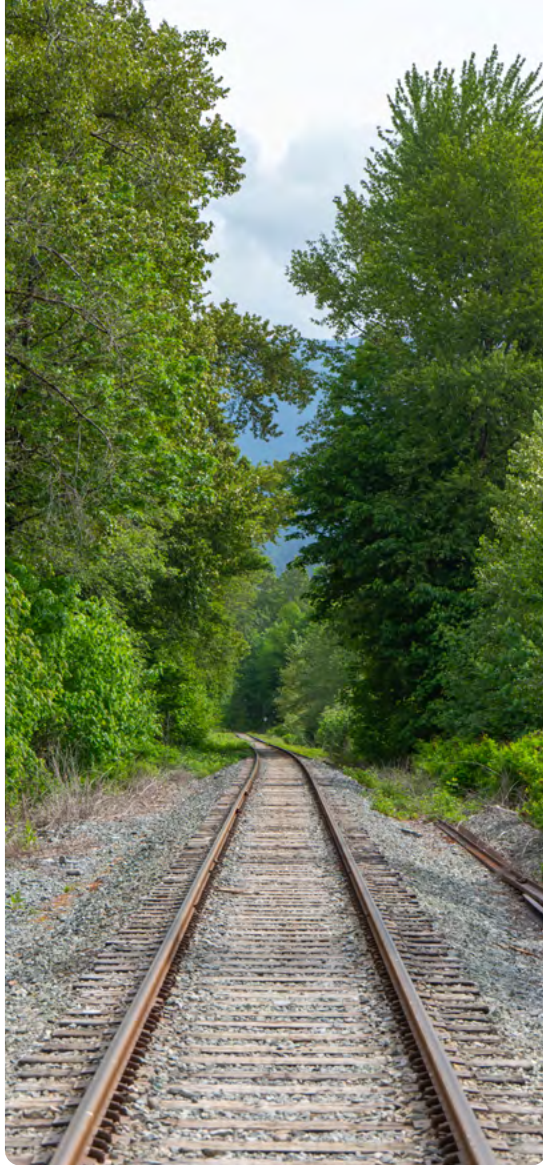
Impacts to Cultural Practices

In oral history interviews, Skwxwú7mesh People described barriers to practising cultural traditions, including berry picking, fishing, hunting and spiritual bathing, and barriers to accessing culturally significant sites. They discuss the barriers stemming from the colonial and assimilation policies and laws that were set in place before the District's establishment but explained the generational impacts that they had and continue to have on Skwxwú7mesh People.

Interviews with Elders highlighted the severe impacts that residential school had on Skwxwú7mesh People mentally, physically, socially, culturally, and spiritually. They further explained how the psychological impacts of those experiences shaped their ability to participate in community, exercise their rights, and their trust of government institutions. They describe having to not only relearn cultural and spiritual traditions but restore their sense of pride in these practices.

Staff and oral history interviews highlighted that access to sacred and culturally significant lands were impacted by development and settlement in the area. Some interviews explained that they felt archaeological assessments have been limited, and colonial approaches to governance left little room for ceremonial or cultural practice.





Land Use Issues

The use of land is a significant factor on the relationship between Skwxwú7mesh People and the District. Oral history interviews highlighted the deep connections Skwxwú7mesh People have to the lands and waters. The interviews describe how access to their territory has been compromised over time due to formal and informal barriers such as policy-changes to accessing certain areas or overcrowding in areas that were once sacred and private.

District records and oral history interviews show reserve-related land use issues. The interviews state that development next to reserves, including some with incompatible uses, compromised reserve safety and access.

Moreover, the records show that the District acquired land that was originally part of reserve, including sites that are culturally significant. And there was also evidence of barriers to Squamish Nation seeking additions to reserve.



Impacts of Tourism and Development

Oral history interviews highlight that growth in tourism and recreation has brought pressures that fall unevenly on Skwxwú7mesh People and on the lands and waters they rely on.

Interviews described a lack of recognition of the sacredness of the lands and waters. Concerns included insufficient campgrounds and washroom facilities, garbage, unauthorized fires, trespassing, boats speeding on the river, and risks to the safety of foods and medicines. They explain that development has also brought environmental impacts, restricted access to culturally significant sites and overcrowding. District records also show examples of Squamish Nation advocating against certain development or infrastructure projects in light of the potential impacts they may have had on the environment. Interviews also identified that many new people to Squamish may be unaware of Skwxwú7mesh history and culture.



Squamish Nation Engagement and Representation

Records provide incidences when People expressed interest in being more involved in governance and decision making. Oral history interviews describe difficulties with engaging in District processes, advisory boards and governance structures. They reflect frustration with being left out of decision making processes.

Interviews also highlight instances where District consultation with the Squamish Nation was done on an ad hoc basis rather than respecting the government to government channels. They further described that engagement depended heavily on individual relationships, which meant outcomes were inconsistent.

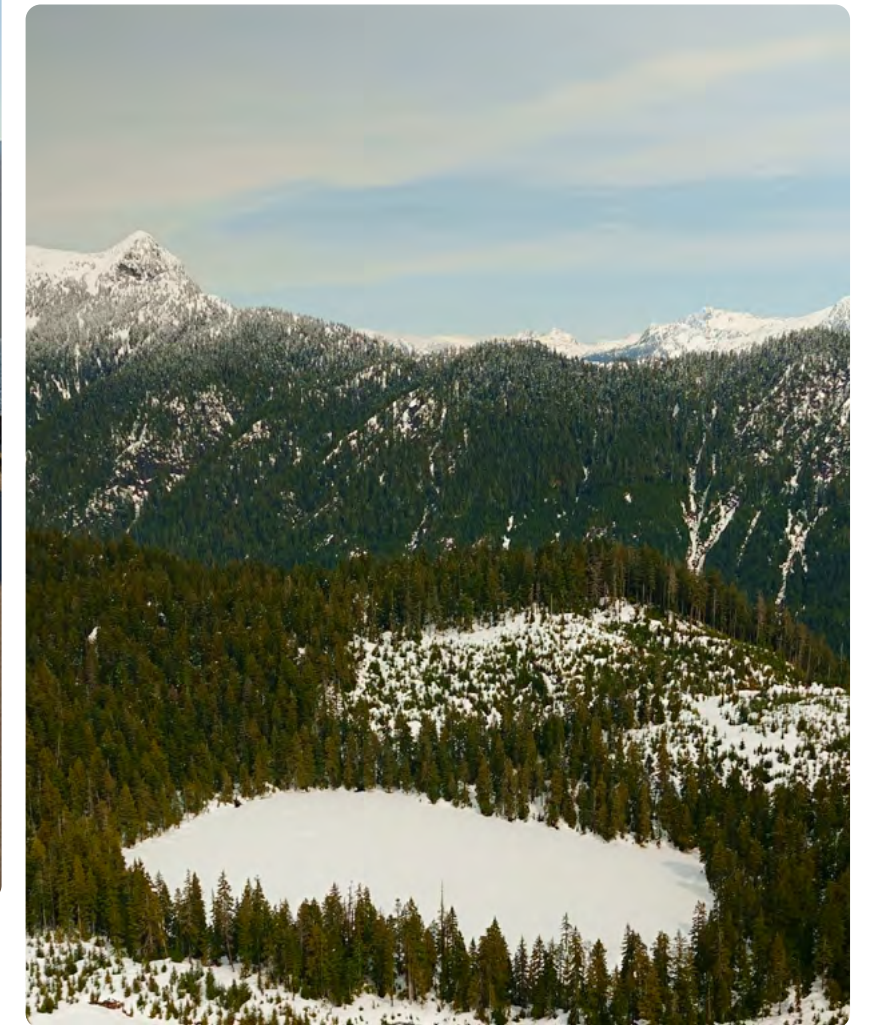


Photo: Mark Edwards

Formal Apology Ceremony



"We offer you this apology with good intentions—for a strong future and shared path forward, together."

The Formal Apology Ceremony

On September 19, 2026 at Totem Hall in St'a7mes, Sk̓wxwú7mesh People, Squamish Nation elected officials, and staff welcomed District of Squamish elected officials and staff for an important cultural ceremony. During this ceremony, the Mayor, on behalf of District of Squamish Council, delivered a Formal Apology (included on page 5 of this Report) to Sk̓wxwú7mesh Úxwumixw for recent and historical harms.

The ceremony was grounded in cultural protocol and included teachings carried forward from Sk̓wxwú7mesh People from generation to generation since time immemorial.



About the Ceremony:

The ceremony was a Cedar Brushing and Blanketing Ceremony, a sacred cultural practice that supports healing, reconciliation, and renewal. According to Sk̓wxwú7mesh cultural knowledge keepers, this ceremony allows for individuals and families to stand before the community with humility and courage, while sharing their hearts, acknowledging hardships, and seeking to make amends for actions or circumstances that may have caused hurt, misunderstanding, or grievance. The ceremony began with a blessing, a shared meal, an opening song and drumming.

To offer the Formal Apology in a culturally informed way, District elected officials acted as the “host family”. A family hosts a ceremony when they “have work on their mind”. In this case, the work was the Formal Apology.



There is great significance of the blanketing and brushing during these ceremonies. Blanketing symbolizes wrapping one with the care, support, collective strength, and the embrace of the community. Cedar brushing is a cleansing practice that helps release burdens and promotes healing, renewal, and positive change.



Participants were blanketed and brushed by cedar during the ceremony. Each group that was chosen held significance in the ceremony:

- Siyáms (Chiefs) - Representing how Skwxwú7mesh Nation governance, leadership, and self-determination was impacted by District decisions.
- Elders, matriarchs, and patriarchs - Representing the impacts to family connections, and how culture, knowledge, and traditions were passed along.
- Youth - representing impacts to future generations.





"I was humbled to be welcomed into ceremony with the Squamish Nation, in the Squamish Nation's space, as we do this important work — acknowledging past harms and committing ourselves to a better path forward. We deeply thank the Squamish Nation for your meaningful guidance throughout this work, and for the wisdom you continue to share as we not only acknowledge our shared history but plot a better path forward together."

Armand Hurford, Mayor,
District of Squamish

"It took generations for us to get here, and the Ceremony was guided by the spirit of our Ancestors and grounded in our cultural protocol. Since this work began, a new relationship has been taking shape, and our Community's guard has started to come down. In our culture, we use the word Nch'ú7mut, meaning 'one heart and one mind,' to describe a shared experience like this. That is what this day was, for me and for all our People in attendance."

Sxwíxwtn Wilson Williams, Chairperson,
Sḵw̓xwú7mesh Úxwumíxw
(Squamish Nation)





The path of learning about the shared history of the District and Squamish Nation continues to be an important ongoing process in the District's reconciliation journey. This path creates an opportunity to share lessons and wisdom, and continue to build the relationship that follows. The Memorandum of Understanding between the two governments continues to serve as a pathway for shared reconciliation goals and priority activities.

The District plans to continue to review archival information, facilitate opportunities for oral history interviews with Skwxwú7mesh People, and to share those learnings with the wider community.

Each harm identified through this work provides a lesson on how the District can work differently today and carry that learning into its relationship with Squamish Nation.

The lessons in these themes are part of the work that continues after the Formal Apology including how the District builds shared understanding with the community.

Appendix A. Terminology

Colonization – the process by which one People asserts control over the lands, governance, economies and cultural practices of another. In this context, it refers to the assertion of Crown and settler authority over Skwxwú7mesh territory, and the systems that followed from it.

Crown - The Crown in government is a legal and political term that represents the supreme executive power and authority of the state in Commonwealth realms like Canada.

Elders – Skwxwú7mesh community members recognized for their knowledge, experience and role in carrying and sharing teachings.

Knowledge Keepers – individuals who hold and share cultural, historical, or language knowledge within a Nation.

Land Back – a movement and body of practice concerned with the return of lands to Indigenous Nations, and with the recognition of Indigenous rights, title and jurisdiction over lands and waters.

Oral history – knowledge and accounts of the past carried and transmitted through spoken word. Within Skwxwú7mesh practice, oral history is a legitimate and rigorous record.

Reconciliation – the work of rebuilding relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples on the basis of truth, respect and changed practice.

Reserve – land set apart by the Federal Crown for the use and benefit of a First Nation. Reserves in Squamish were first established in 1876.

Rights and Title – the inherent rights of Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw to their lands, waters and resources, and to govern themselves. These rights are affirmed in Canadian law and in international instruments.

Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw – the Squamish Nation. Where this report refers to the People rather than the government, it uses Skwxwú7mesh People.

Systemic racism – racial inequity that is embedded within institutions, policies and ordinary practice, rather than expressed only through individual acts.

ta wanáwx sníchim – the true words. The name given to this truth-telling work.

Truth-telling – the practice of documenting and acknowledging historical harm, which must come before reconciliation.

UNDRIP – the [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#), adopted by Canada and implemented in British Columbia through the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act.



Photo: Squamish Nation

