

Mâmawatoskêwak Advisory Circle

Indigenous Community Cultural Centre (ICC)

Community Site Recommendation Report

February 3rd, 2026

Mâdawatoskêwak Advisory Circle

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1. Executive Summary

The Indigenous Community Cultural Centre (ICC) project is an Indigenous-led initiative. Shaped by community voices, guided by cultural values in Natural Laws and as stakeholders with a passion in their responsibility for long-term stewardship of the land in Red Deer.

The Indigenous community in the city have long envisioned a permanent, welcoming space for their ceremonies, a place that allows them to encourage building connections with each other and with the wider community through culture and knowledge sharing opportunities. A place where transference of knowledge, learning and healing is promoted and celebrated. An Indigenous Community Cultural Centre (ICC) allows decolonization (Indigenization) through reconciliation by involving both Indigenous-led efforts to reclaim culture and self-governance and encouraging government -led actions to dismantle colonial systems, build respectful relationships, and address historical harms.

This report provides a consolidated overview of Indigenous community engagement, historical work, guiding principles, and site-related feedback regarding the proposed Indigenous Community Cultural Centre (ICC) in Red Deer.

Mandate & Authority

The Mâwatoskêwak Advisory Circle was created from collaborative community discussions for representation in the first preliminary stage of the cultural centre and they are guided through consensus by Indigenous Natural Laws.

Mâwatoskêwak functions as the community representatives and stewards of the community voices that identified the Indigenous Cultural Centre values and site requirements.

Background & Rationale

Indigenous leaders and community members over the past 30 years in Red Deer, have advocated for a permanent, Indigenous-led culture centre as a place for ceremony, culture, learning, and healing. An Indigenous Cultural Centre (ICC) will promote resiliency through cultural continuity and shift the City of Red Deer from Performative Reconciliatory Actions into Transformative Concrete Actions that support various TRC Call to Action (1, 2, 4, 10, 20, 59, 87,92) and UNDRIP (United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples) principles into urban planning through collaboration with the Red Deer Indigenous community.

2. Community-Identified Site Requirements

Through the Community Readiness Assessment and collaborative discussions, the following requirements were identified as essential for any future Indigenous Community Cultural Centre site.

Outdoor Space

- Minimum site size of over 30 acres, with strong preference for expansion toward 100 acres.
- Dedicated outdoor powwow grounds.
- Clean and culturally appropriate ceremonial land.
- Space for Tipi's, culture camps, regalia making, and seasonal celebrations.
- Medicine gardens, food sovereignty initiatives, storage, and water access.
- Outdoor healing and recovery spaces.
- Natural surroundings that support land-based learning and healing.

Indoor Space

- Minimum 10,000 sq. ft. facility with expansion capability.
- Multi-functional ceremonial and gathering spaces.
- Kitchen and shared meal areas.
- Storage and administrative spaces.
- Cultural learning areas for Elders, Knowledge Keepers, youth, and leadership development.
- Flexible space design to support wellness, social services, and entrepreneurship.

Access and Transportation

- Proximity to public transit.
- Safe and convenient road access.
- Adequate parking, including accessible and RV parking.
- Accommodation for active transportation.

Location and Surroundings

- Within or near city limits.
- Preference for proximity to water.
- Ability to develop incrementally over time.
- High visibility to support reconciliation and public awareness.
- Compatible and supportive neighbouring land uses.
- Development timeline does not exceed 10 years.

Governance and Use

- Indigenous ownership or long-term control enabling Indigenous-led governance.
- Opportunities for Indigenous economic development and tourism.
- Welcoming to the broader community while maintaining Indigenous authority.

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Youth and Generational Continuity

- Dedicated youth spaces.
- Areas for lifelong learning and skill development.
- Infrastructure supporting long-term cultural continuity. Formal Site Recommendation.

3. PROCESS OF SITE SELECTION AND CRITERIA

Step One

The first Community Conversation for the Indigenous Cultural Centre was held in the fall of 2024. Held at Festival Hall and there were approximately 100 people, both Indigenous and allies who set the initial site criteria with their hopes and dreams for a local Indigenous culture centre. Participants were also asked to share what facilities and site needs would be needed. A Working Collaborative Group was formed by those who expressed interest in participating.

Step Two

In the spring of 2025, the Working Collaborative Group chose 22 potential sites. At that time, the Working Collaborative Group appointed eleven members to form an Advisory Circle to guide the work of choosing a site based on the community needs and wants. In the Spring of 2025, the Mâmwatoskêwak Advisory Circle was formed.

In the summer of 2025, the Mâmwatoskêwak Advisory Circle took the list of 22 potential sites and based on the site criteria narrowed this list to six. Those sites were Riverbend, Steinhauer Subdivision, Heritage Ranch, Michener Grounds, Signet Close, and Piper Creek. In the fall of 2025, the Working Collaborative Group reviewed the six sites and narrowed this list to three utilizing the site criteria that excluded Riverbend, Steinhauer, and Piper Creek, leaving Heritage Ranch, Michener Grounds (now Michener Park/O'Brien Wetlands), and Signet Close.

Step Three

In collaboration with The City of Red Deer, the Working Collaborative Group and the Advisory Circle conducted an in-depth assessment of the top three sites, including site visits. The assessment focused on the sites that received the strongest recommendation from Step Two, with attention to how each location aligns with community-identified priorities, cultural use, access, and long-term development potential.

To support local decision-making, Mâmwatoskêwak consulted with Indigenous groups in both Edmonton and Calgary who have experience developing Indigenous Cultural Centre's. These consultations highlighted the importance of selecting a site large enough to meet long-term community needs and advancing the project through phased development to better manage planning, construction, funding, and staffing resources.

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In October 2025, members toured Edmonton's Kihcihkaw Askî site and learned about the multi-year development process, governance model, and challenges related to land size, zoning, and bylaw limitations. The group also met virtually with Calgary's Indigenous Gathering Place Society to understand their progress and lessons learned.

In December 2025 representatives of the Mâwatoskêwak and The City of Red Deer, sat with the Elders Circle at UIVS. The Elders were updated on the groups supporting documents, site visit tours and timeline. Feedback was agreeable to the information shared.

Comparative Site Analysis

Criteria	Heritage Ranch	Michener Park/O'Brien Wetlands	Signet Close
Strengths	Strong land/water/trail connections; plant medicines; cultural tourism potential	Central location; existing services; healing/reclamation significance; stewardship potential	High visibility; accessible; landmark potential for reconciliation
Challenges	Privacy for ceremony; highway noise, public recreation conflicts; flood/erosion risk; gravel pit limitations; winter access; leaseholders	Environmental remediation; wetland protection; residential encroachment; potential site of proposed Aquatic Centre	Complex ownership; commercial pressure; safety/social challenges; limited space; weak connection to natural ceremonial areas, highway noise
Alignment with Requirements	Constrained privacy/expansion; governance complexity	Strong alignment with healing mandate, visibility, services; scalable development	Visibility good; insufficient natural/ceremonial features ; space limits
Governance Feasibility	More than one operator on site	No current operator agreement	Multiple property ownership
Technical Elements	Adequate parking Minimal neighbourhood impact Established access routes (expandable for fire/emergency) Potential on-site transit stops	Minimal neighbourhood notification Remediation underway for land transfer Expandable utilities (west side) Outdoor expansion potential	Electrical Transmission line running through property. Difficult to determine appropriate use

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Step Four

The goal of the Community Meeting on February 11, 2026, was to update the top three sites chosen by the Working Collaborative and Advisory Circle and inform the community on the recommended site. The Advisory Circle will finalize the site recommendation report for The City by May 2026.

Evaluation Criteria

EVALUATION CRITERIA		
INDIGENOUS CULTURE CENTRE POTENTIAL SITES		
Legend		
Symbol	Meaning	Colour Accent
✓	Meets the criteria	Green
◐	Partially meets the criteria	Yellow
✗	Does not meet the criteria	Red

Heritage Ranch	
Site Criteria	Meets?
Enough land for ceremony, nature, and quiet reflection	◐
Safe and respectful space for cultural use	✗
Room to grow programs and buildings over time	◐
Easy to access (parking, trails, transit)	◐
Works well with surrounding uses	✗
Supports long-term Indigenous leadership and stewardship	✗

✨ At a glance:
Strong natural setting, yet public recreation, noise, and governance challenges limit long-term cultural use.

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Michener Park/Michael O'Brien Wetlands

Site Criteria	Meets ?
Enough land for ceremony, healing, and land-based learning	✓
Safe, protected space for cultural activities	✓
Room to grow for future generations	✓
Central and easy to access	✓
Compatible with long-term cultural use	◐
Supports Indigenous-led stewardship and healing	✓

✨ At a glance:
Strong cultural meaning, large land base, and excellent long-term potential for Indigenous leadership and growth.

Signet Close

Site Criteria	Meets?
Enough land for ceremony and land-based use	✗
Quiet, safe space for cultural activities	✗
Room to grow over time	✗
Highly visible and easy to find	✓
Works well with surrounding uses	✗
Supports long-term Indigenous cultural continuity	✗

✨ At a glance:
Highly visible, but limited space, noise, and surrounding uses make it unsuitable for long-term cultural needs

4. Short-listed Site Tours for Potential Considerations:

1. *Heritage Ranch*

Participants highlighted strong connections to land, water, and trails, noting opportunities for ceremony, plant medicines, and cultural tourism. Concerns focused on privacy, ceremonial protection, and suitability for long-term use in a high-traffic recreation area. Possible development alongside current structures will be limited to approximately one acre.

Planning & Zoning

- Zoned P1 – discretionary public assembly.
- Minimal neighbourhood notification required.

Servicing & Access

- Readily serviceable, sufficient parking.
- Access routes in place; expandable for emergency services.
- Potential transit stops.
- Water service may be extended to Meadow's area.
- Meadow's area is accessible but permanent development will not be possible

Key Concerns

- Highway noise, flood/erosion risk, environmental impacts.
- Protection of ceremonial spaces.
- Infrastructure feasibility and levies.

2. *Michener Park/ O'Brien Wetlands*

Strong emotional connections to history, healing, and reclamation were noted. Opportunities exist for stewardship, sustainability, and future development, though concerns include environmental remediation, wetland protection, and opposition to a major recreational aquatic centre near cultural spaces.

Planning & Zoning

- Zoned P1 – discretionary public assembly.
- Minimal neighbourhood notification.
- Development is recommended in the area known as O'Brien Wetlands.

Servicing & Access

- Serviceable along edges; utilities expandable.
- Remediation ongoing; land transfer from Provincial Government pending.
- Parking available; access roads can be built; potential transit stops.

Key Concerns

- Wetland protection, residential encroachment.
- Timing depends on land transfer and services.
- Opposition to co-locating aquatic centre near ceremonial areas.

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3. *Signet Close*

Highly visible and accessible, with potential as a reconciliation landmark. Challenges include complex landownership, highway noise, commercial pressure, and limited space for cultural activities.

Planning & Zoning

- Zoned Commercial, High-Density Residential, and Urban Forest Sanctuary.
- Protected tree areas; residential potential per structure plan.

Servicing & Access

- Requires significant services, multiple access options possible.
- Electrical transmission line and uneven terrain present constraints

Key Concerns

- Highway noise, safety, and social challenges.
- Conflicts between commercial, residential, and cultural uses.
- Infrastructure feasibility and service provision.

5. **RECOMMENDATION FOR SITE**

The Advisory Circle recommends the Michener Park/O'Brien Wetlands, for its natural landscape, central location, and governance feasibility.

Recommendation of Governance & Ownership Model

Indigenous-led non-profit or trust, Board with Elders, youth, and community reps.
Land tenure through acquisition or long-term lease.

Recommended Next Steps

Final Site Recommendation Report to Council.
Creation of a Site Development Advisory Circle.

Conclusion

The ICC represents a vital step toward reconciliation, cultural continuity, and Indigenous self-determination in Red Deer. The Mâmawatoskêwak Advisory Circle stands ready to participate in the Centre's governance and development, ensuring it meets the long-term needs of the Indigenous community.

Additional documents available upon request:

ICC Guiding Document
Mâmawatoskêwak Terms of Reference
September 23, 2025 – What We Heard Report