Winnipeg | Indigenous Relations
Relations avec les Autochtones

JOURNEY OF RECONCILIATION
LES CHEMINS DE LA RÉCONCILIATION

**WELCOMING WINNIPEG – Request Summary**

NOTE: Request summaries are compiled by Indigenous Relations employees to ensure that identifiable, or potentially identifiable, third-party personal information or information of a sensitive nature is excluded from what is made publicly available. Indigenous Relations permits viewing of the full original submission by appointment through 311.

**Request ID:** 2021-010

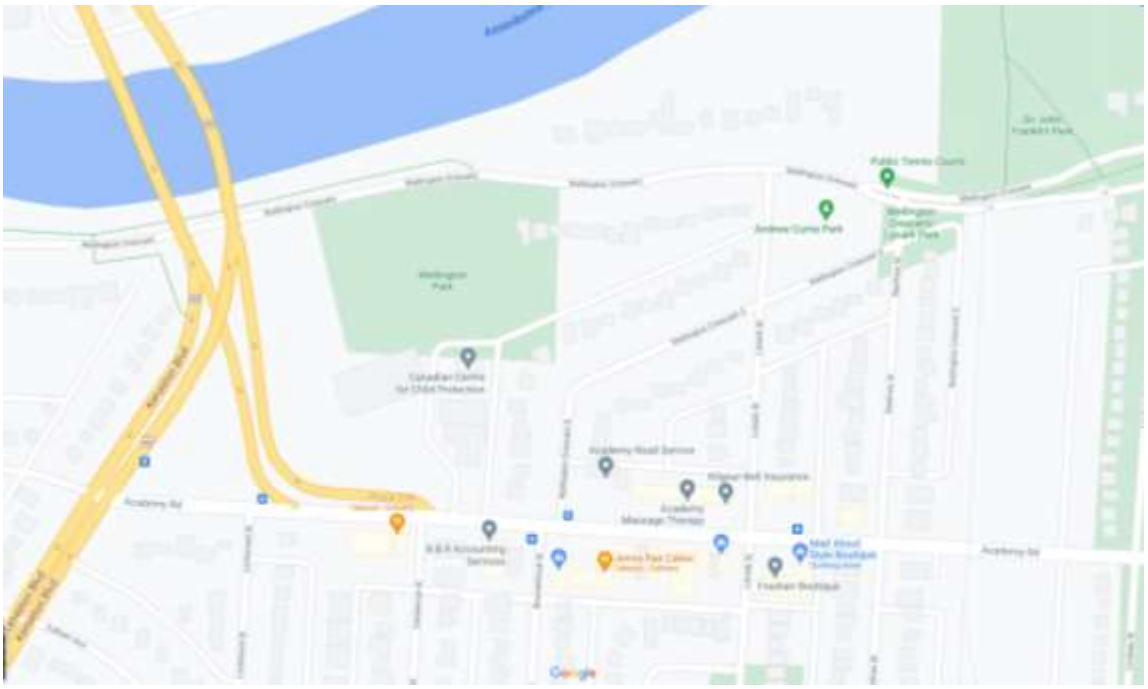
**Name of Request:** Renaming Wellington Park to Theodore Niizhota Fontaine Park

**Address:** S/S Wellington Cr E of Kenaston Boulevard

**Demonstrated Community Support:**

- Petition submitted: yes, with 489 signatures
- Letters of support provided: 1

**Project Details:**



**How does this renaming contribute to a 'Welcoming Winnipeg', as defined in the policy and what kind of evidence/research can be provided to support this state**

Ultimately achieves a balanced perspective/story

Alignment to City of Winnipeg goals: Welcoming Winnipeg Reconciling Our History Policy: to resolve the absence of Indigenous perspectives, experiences, and contributions in the stories remembered and commemorated, and the City of Winnipeg's commitment to the journey of reconciliation.

Honours an Indigenous leader who dedicated his life to promoting understanding, empathy, awareness, and reconciliation with regard to Canada's legacy of Indian Residential Schools. Theodore Fontaine embodied reconciliation by forging positive relationships with and between settler and Indigenous communities. He dedicated his final years to preserving the history of the Assiniboia Residential School and in engaging the River Heights community with its presence in their neighbourhood.

Promotes Indigenous reclamation of land, space and/or language

The former school building site is now privately owned, leaving only the playing fields and a small parcel of grass along Academy Road available to the Survivors. In recent years, the playing field has been the site of several reunions for Assiniboia Survivors, as well as an Orange Shirt Day event. The Assiniboia Residential School Legacy Group is in process of building a commemorative site on the Academy Road Parcel. This site will feature Indigenous languages, with information panels translated into Cree and Anishinaabe, as well as the Indigenous names of the communities from which students were sent to Assiniboia.

The name Niizhota, meaning "two hearts" in Anishinaabe, was the name of Theodore Fontaine's grandfather and for him signified an excess of love and empathy, as well as a coming together of two people, communities, or nations in mutual respect and care. This name establishes the park as a site of reconciliation.

Offers an educational opportunity

The Assiniboia Residential School Legacy group is preparing information panels that will offer an educational opportunity for visitors to the Academy Road commemorative site. The renaming of Wellington Park enhances this education by honouring someone who was a tireless educator about residential schools. So many students in our community have learned about residential schools through Ted visiting their classroom. In total, he presented Canadian national Bestseller *Broken Circle: The Dark Legacy of*

*Indian Residential Schools, A Memoir* to more than 1000 audiences in Canada and the United States.

Supports telling the complete history of Winnipeg

The title of the book produced by Survivors of the Assiniboia Residential School, *Did You See Us?*, captures how they have felt excluded from the history of Winnipeg. Too often, their presence was unnoticed, and they did not feel embraced and accepted by neighbours, the business community, teachers, and others with whom they had contact. Theodore Fontaine was instrumental in promoting their visibility.

Additional information

Wellington Park is named after Arthur Wellington Ross, a lawyer, politician, and land speculator. Ross is also remembered through Wellington Crescent. In the mid-to-late 1880s, he held much of the Fort Rouge area. He did so be acquiring Métis scrip, employing "claim runners" to buy the scrip as soon as it was issued. To this extent, Wellington's name is associated with Indigenous dispossession.

**Does this site have historical significance to the Indigenous community? Research Support:**

This park is connected historically to 621 Academy Road, the former Julia Clark School and Assiniboia Residential School Classroom Building, which is presently on the List of Historical Resources. These playing fields are of historical significance. This was where the residential school students played hockey, football, baseball, held winter carnivals, and engaged in other activities. Several city champion hockey teams played at the hockey rinks built behind the school. This was also the site of much of their day-to-day social activity, though it was divided by an "invisible line" separating the young women from the young men. These fields are very important to the legacy and commemoration of the Assiniboia Residential School. Student memories are connected to this space and its intersections with the historically designated classrooms building. Two images of student activities in the park are appended to this application.

Theodore Fontaine spent the final years of his life advocating for the commemoration of this site to bring it to the attention of the people of Winnipeg. Theodore's reflections on the significance of the playing fields are captured in the chapter he contributed to Did You See Us? Reunion, Remembrance, and Reclamation at an Urban Indian Residential School (University of Manitoba Press, 2021):

"In this last phase of my life, dedicated to public awareness and reconciliation, I visit the Canadian Centre for Child Protection often. They welcome me with all the love, understanding, and tenderness that I missed so desperately during my twelve years of

incarceration in Indian residential schools. I park at the edge of the playing fields where we used to play hockey and baseball. I am thankful that the City of Winnipeg has preserved this precious land. The little hillside by the railway tracks is sometimes filled with the laughter of children sledding and, in the summer, the fields resound with the joy of baseball games."

**If this application is not supported, what would the negative impact on the community be? (If applicable)**

The former classrooms building (the Julia Clarke Schoolhouse) and the land on which the Assiniboia dormitory sat, where the former RCMP forensics facility now sits, are both now privately owned. The Assiniboia Residential School Legacy Group has secured a small strip of land along Academy Road for the establishment of a commemorative site, but the group remains worried that their history on this land, and its role in the broader Indian Residential Schools system, will be erased. Theodore Fontaine led our group in preventing this erasure, so it is an ideal space in which to remember him.

**Any additional information the applicant would like the CCM to consider in making their recommendation.**

The Anishinaabe word "Niizhota," which was Theodore's great grandfather's name, means two hearts. This symbol was of great significance to Ted, communicating an excess of love and empathy, but also the ideas of reconciliation and relationships, bringing together the hearts of individuals and peoples.

A signed support letter and list of signatories to a petition are included on the next page. The petition can be visited here to see supporters' comments: http://chng.it/5rmfH9nS

A digital map with information about the school and the 2017 Reunion can be found here: https://residentialschoolsatlas.org/index.html?module=module.assiniboia