

From John A. Macdonald to miyo-wâhkôhtowin Road: Lessons Learned

The Place Identity Framework (Framework) points to how future street name changes can be considered and how a change of name process should be managed. The lessons identified below from the renaming of John A. Macdonald to miyo-wâhkôhtowin informed the Framework. These lessons will also inform future revisions to [Council Policy C09-008 - Naming of Civic Property and Development Areas](#) (Civic Naming Policy).

Deciding When and If to Rename

It is not unusual for place names to change. Rivers, streets and parks, and even towns and cities across Canada have been renamed for social, political, geographic, and wayfinding reasons. Ottawa was once Bytown; and in New Brunswick in 1995, Chatham, Newcastle, and Nelson were amalgamated as the city of Miramichi. In 1987, the downtown portion of Dorchester Boulevard in Montreal was renamed *boulevard René-Lévesque*. Closer to home, when the town of Sutherland amalgamated with Saskatoon, its numbered streets had 100 added to them, leaving us today, for example, with 108th street to differentiate from 8th Street.

In the case of John A. Macdonald Road in Saskatoon, [City Council's 2021 decision](#) to rename reinforced the City's commitment to implementing Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action. Saskatoon was not alone in changing a street name for this reason. In Ottawa, in 2023, The National Capital Commission renamed the Sir John A. Macdonald Parkway as Kichi Zībī Mīkan. In Winnipeg, what was Bishop Grandin Boulevard was renamed Abinojii Mikanah, while in Muskoka, Ontario Muskoka Road 38 was renamed Kanien'kehá:ka lohatátie.

Street names are critical for municipal addressing, emergency response services, and are tied to an individual's personal identification. Changing a street name impacts not only residents and businesses located on the street but also service providers to those addresses. Changing the name of a street should be considered an exceptional circumstance and not a decision taken lightly. The Framework and forthcoming revisions to the Civic Naming Policy will include a step-by-step guide to assist in determining if, when and how a name change should take place and will provide alternatives to renaming.

Process for Determining the New Name

City Council's 2021 decision to rename the John A. Macdonald Road included the direction that the renaming process include public education and public engagement, specifically:

- Consultation with Indigenous community leaders, residential school survivors and Elders and Knowledge Keepers;
- Direct communication with John A. Macdonald Road residents;
- Informing Confederation Park neighbourhood residents;
- A wider community public education campaign; and

- A look at options to manage any costs of changing names and what tools could be used to facilitate a change.

While it took two years from the date of Council's direction to the name being approved, given the reasons for the name change, care was taken in how Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and residential school survivors were respectfully engaged in the process. In the winter of 2023, the John A. Macdonald Road Renaming Advisory Committee (Advisory Committee) was struck by Administration to discuss, consider and ultimately recommend the new name. It was comprised of Indigenous leaders, Residential school survivors, Elders, Knowledge Keepers and youth; the Saskatoon Intercultural Association; a member from the Chinese community; teachers from wâhkôhtowin school; a representative of the Confederation Park Community Association, and one road resident. The Committee was struck to discuss, consider and ultimately recommend the new name.

As part of the deliberations, the Advisory Committee learned about the differences between Indigenous worldviews and colonial systems as well as the importance of ceremony and naming and names from a Knowledge Keeper. They also created a shared experience and built understanding of the impacts of colonialism.

While the process to determine the new name was deemed appropriate for this particular street name change, each situation is likely to be different depending on the reason for the name change and the degree of impact. While some might question the length of time it took to change the name to miyo-wâhkôhtowin Road, taking the time to do it correctly is an emerging theme from the experiences of other municipalities. Time allows for new facts, different perspectives, and additional voices to come forward.

The Framework and forthcoming revisions to the Civic Naming Policy will provide a process and guidance for future name changes including suggestions on process length.

Communication, Engagement, and Education

Communication, engagement and education are three separate but related and important functions that need to be thoughtfully considered for any future name change. With the renaming of the Road, the process entrusted an appointed Committee to recommend a new name, but this decision was not clearly communicated to road residents, many of whom were left with the notion that they could suggest or even vote on a new name. In the case of John A. Macdonald Road, residents were informed of decisions that had already been made but they were not actively engaged in all aspects of the process.

For any future street name change, clear strategies for communication, engagement and education should be developed prior to the launch of the project and communicated to those directly or indirectly impacted by the change. Greater clarity from the outset needs to be given to ensure those impacted understand their role in the process; whether it be informed, consulted or engaged, or all three.

Who Does What

While it is the decision of City Council to decide that a street name be changed, it is Administration that is tasked with developing a process to do so. For this particular street, the John A. Macdonald Road Renaming Advisory Committee (discussed above) was struck to discuss and recommend a new name to the Civic Naming Committee. The Civic Naming Committee, following already established process, in turn recommended the name to City Council through the Standing Policy Committee on Planning, Development and Community Services.

A street name change has many implications to not only residents or business on the impacted road but also to government departments and agencies, public and private service providers, and emergency services. Determining degrees of impact can direct required levels of engagement. A civic lead for a street name change needs to be identified early in the process with roles and responsibilities clearly outlined.

Departments involved in the renaming to miyo-wâhkôhtowin Road were:

- Recreation & Community Development
- Indigenous Initiatives
- Communications & Public Engagement
- Planning & Development
- Community Standards
- Corporate Revenue
- Information Technology
- Saskatoon Fire
- Water and Waste Operations
- Transportation

The John A. Macdonald to miyo-wâhkôhtowin Road name change demonstrated the importance of City Council and their Committees to provide residents with a public platform to express opinions before a decision is made. The John A Macdonald Road name change was discussed publicly in either Council Chambers or Committee Room on five occasions:

June 28, 2021: Saskatoon City Council approved beginning the process to rename John A. Macdonald Road to recognize the ongoing harm in the community experienced by residential schools.

August 1, 2023: The Civic Naming Committee endorsed the recommendation from the John A. Macdonald Road Renaming Advisory Committee and recommended to the Standing Policy Committee on Planning, Development and Community Services that the name miyo-wâhkôhtowin be added to the Names Master List.

August 9, 2023: The Standing Policy Committee on Planning, Development and Community Services resolved that the name miyo-wâhkôhtowin be added to the

Names Master List and be endorsed for use as the new name for John A. Macdonald Road.

August 30, 2023: City Council considered a report of the General Manager, Community Services and resolved that the request to rename John A Macdonald Road to miyo-wâhkôhtowin Road be approved and that the City Solicitor's Office be directed to prepare the appropriate bylaw for the street name change.

September 27, 2023: City Council considered Bylaw No. 9921 to change the name of a certain street in the City of Saskatoon as shown on Plan Nos. 74S10164, 69S16660 and 69S16959 resolved that officers of the City of Saskatoon take the appropriate action to carry the said change into effect and have the registered plan affected properly amended.

These five public sessions garnered in total 15 speakers and 19 written submissions.