



Musqueam
Indian Band



News Release
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Portion of ćasnaʔəm village and burial site returned to Musqueam Indian Band

The City of Vancouver has returned a parcel of land located at 8902 Milton Street in present day Marpole to the Musqueam Indian Band, the two parties announced this evening.

The land donation marks the return of a portion of the site known as the Great Fraser Midden, Eburne Midden, and Marpole Midden. It has never ceased to be ćasnaʔəm to Musqueam.

Council made the decision to donate the property as part of its ongoing commitments as a City of Reconciliation and to provide assistance for the conservation of the land as protected heritage property under the Vancouver Charter. The land was returned to a wholly-owned subsidiary of the Musqueam Indian Band.

“As part of our traditional territory, ćasnaʔəm is very important to the Musqueam people. It has never ceased to be part of our identity, as we have a sense of knowing and belonging to our land that is very strong. ćasnaʔəm has special significance to us, as it is one of the named places that our ancestors lived and practiced their culture and way of life. The site is invaluable in preserving a small, tangible and intangible part of our history and culture that, unlike so much else, has to date survived non-Aboriginal settlement in our traditional lands. It is the final resting place of many of our ancestors, and contains belongings of immense cultural value to Musqueam, British Columbians and Canadians.

Musqueam has successfully acquired several portions of the ćasnaʔəm site in order to protect and preserve our heritage. Seeking the return of the remaining parcels of ćasnaʔəm is consistent with our responsibilities as caretakers of our culture and history, and our long-term goal of ensuring the protection of the entire village site, while publicly recognizing the heritage significance of ćasnaʔəm and celebrating our ancient roots,” said Chief Wayne Sparrow.

The donation was announced at a community event held at the Musqueam Cultural Education and Resource Centre this evening.

“As a City of Reconciliation, Vancouver is committed to working with the Musqueam Indian Band to move forward together,” said Mayor Gregor Robertson. “Returning the City’s parcel on the ćasnaʔəm site to its original caretakers is one of many necessary steps we need to take as a city that is truly committed to building a deep and meaningful relationship with Indigenous communities.”



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While Musqueam people had many villages, the main winter village was always located at the mouth of the Fraser River. Over 8,000 years ago, that village was səwq̓ʷeqsən (south footing of Alex Fraser Bridge). As the delta grew and the mouth of the river moved, many Musqueam people moved with it. ćəsnaʔəm is over 4,000 years old, and it was Musqueam's largest village 2,500 years ago. With the changing delta, most people moved to x̣ʷməθkʷəỵəm (Musqueam's present community) approximately 1,500 years ago.

ćəsnaʔəm, like so much of Musqueam's territory, was converted into an industrial and residential area. Ancestral remains and belongings were unearthed, collected and traded. In 1991, Musqueam purchased the Fraser Arms Hotel to protect the portion of ćəsnaʔəm buried underneath it. In 2012, development on another portion of the site unearthed more ancestors. Musqueam advocated for protection to prevent further desecration. Community members held vigil at ćəsnaʔəm for over 200 days, supported by many Vancouverites and people from around the world until an agreement was finally reached, and Musqueam purchased the parcels imminently threatened by development to protect them.

The return of the parcel of land at 8902 Milton Street by the City of Vancouver protects and recognizes the important history, culture, and heritage of ćəsnaʔəm for Musqueam, and for all Canadians.

Musqueam is working on remediating the site to protect the ancestors and belongings still there. The long-term vision is to protect and commemorate ćəsnaʔəm, with further details to be confirmed through future engagement with Musqueam community members.

The costs to Musqueam associated with the donation are the usual land title transfer fees, Land Title Office application, registration fees and its own legal costs, and the Band will also be responsible for payment of the GST associated with the land transfer. The estimated market value of the property is \$2.3 million.

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