City of West Hollywood Land Acknowledgment and Policy Guide

Land Acknowledgment

The land that is currently known as the City of West Hollywood is on the ancestral, and unceded homelands of the Gabrieleño Tongva and Gabrieleño Kizh (pronounced "Keesh") peoples. The Tongva and Kizh are the original peoples of Tovaangar, which includes Los Angeles County, Riverside County, West San Bernardino County, parts of Orange County and the four Southern Channel Islands.

Tovaangar supported an estimated 5,000 to 10,000 people in nearly 100 autonomous village-states, which were connected by kinship, language, culture, and trade. Prior to the Spanish conquest that began in 1769, the people of these villages managed their lands with a deep respect by cultivating, pruning, seeding, and seasonal burning. Villages were often built near rivers, creeks, and other sources of water which supplied a lifeline of food and resources. We acknowledge that the City of West Hollywood is built upon and has benefited from their land stewardship over many generations.

Many Tongva and Kizh continue to live in their traditional territory and care for the lands. We pay our respects to the Tongva and Kizh ancestors, elders, and relatives past, present, and emerging. We recognize the Tongva and Kizh peoples who are still here, and we commit ourselves to honoring and uplifting their stories and culture. We seek to build a restorative relationship with people and place which requires dedication to reciprocity, co-stewardship, repair, and rematriation.

How to Use the City's Land Acknowledgment

The City of West Hollywood's Land Acknowledgment should be used in the following ways:

- Posted on the City's website.
- Included in official City documents, including City meeting agendas for City Council, Commissions, and Advisory Boards, strategic plans, and other reports.
- Read or spoken aloud at all public meetings, City events, and gatherings.

The Land Acknowledgment should be approached not as a set of obligatory words to rush through, but offered with respect, grounded in authentic reflection, presence, and awareness.

The Land Acknowledgment provided in this document should be used as a guide, and the language can be amended appropriately for the specific context in which it will be used. Here are a few examples:

> “I would like to start this meeting by acknowledging that this meeting is taking place on the ancestral, and unceded territory of the Gabrieleño Tongva and Gabrieleño Kizh peoples. The Tongva and Kizh peoples are the traditional caretakers of Tovaangar, which includes Los Angeles County, Riverside County, West San Bernardino County, parts of Orange County, and the four Southern Channel Islands.”
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> “I want to respectfully acknowledge the Gabrieleño Tongva and Gabrieleño Kizh peoples who have stewarded this land that is currently known as the City of West Hollywood throughout the generations, and we pay respect to their elders, past and present.”
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> “We would like to begin by acknowledging that the land on which we gather and that is currently known as the City of West Hollywood is the occupied, unceded, seized territory of the Gabrieleño Tongva and Gabrieleño Kizh peoples.”

Historical Context

Settler colonization is the removal and erasure of Indigenous peoples in order to take the land for use by settlers in perpetuity. Indigenous peoples across the Americas have demonstrated resilience and resistance in the face of violent efforts to separate them from their land, culture, and each other.

California's Indigenous peoples survived waves of genocide from multiple colonizing forces which have stripped them of their land and resources, and brought disease, violence, and indentured servitude. By the late 1700s, only a few native villages remained in the Los Angeles area, as nearly the entire Indigenous population had been forcibly relocated to Spanish missions or found refuge with neighboring tribes, while others died from violence, disease, and extreme conditions. After early settlers had enslaved and assimilated the native peoples, they were compelled to work as ranch hands, water carriers, and servants for Mexican and U.S. citizens during the Mexican regime of the 1830s. The California Gold Rush and the path to statehood further decimated their population as violent campaigns to end Indigenous autonomy continued throughout the state.

Today, California has the second highest Indigenous population in the United States and is home to over 200 tribes from across the Americas. There are dozens of pre-Columbian Indigenous languages spoken throughout the state, including the Tongva language. Los Angeles County is home to more Native American/Alaska Natives than any other county across the United States. There are an estimated 1,700 Tongva living in the Los Angeles area today. While the Tongva community gained state recognition in 1994, the struggle to gain federal recognition is ongoing.

What is a Land Acknowledgment?

A Land Acknowledgment is a formal statement recognizing the history and presence of Indigenous peoples and their enduring relationship to their homelands. Typically, Land Acknowledgments take the form of written and/or verbal statements. It is becoming more common for Land Acknowledgments to be read or spoken at meetings, community gatherings, places of worship, conferences, etc.

The Land Acknowledgment is a statement recognizing the traditional land of Indigenous peoples who have called – and still call – the land home before and after the arrival of settlers. It is a way to honor the original inhabitants of a place and is intended to serve as a symbol of recognition and respect. It is also an expression of gratitude and appreciation to Indigenous peoples whose homelands we currently reside on.

Land Acknowledgments help create awareness of the cultural erasure of Indigenous peoples and the processes of colonization and suppression that have led to the dispossession and displacement of Indigenous peoples from their ancestral homelands and territories.

Why is Land Acknowledgment Important?

The City of West Hollywood is committed to addressing social justice, systemic racism, and equity. The City has worked diligently to defend the fundamental rights of its community members including LGBTQ people, people living with disabilities, seniors, people of color, immigrants, women, and others. Addressing Indigenous rights and bringing a greater public consciousness to Indigenous sovereignty and culture is essential as the City continues its ongoing efforts to promote diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice.

Though a Land Acknowledgment is only one way to recognize our history, it is a meaningful step in beginning to change the way we view the land and discuss land stewardship, rights, ownership, and management. History, heritage, and culture of the Indigenous peoples is an integral part of communities across the country.

By acknowledging the original inhabitants of this land, the City aims to counter the "doctrine of discovery" with the true story of the people who were already here on this land before it was colonized. It is also a way to remind people that colonization is an ongoing process, with Indigenous lands still occupied due to deception and broken treaties, practices of eminent domain, and mechanisms intended to benefit government or corporations. Through a Land Acknowledgment, the City of West Hollywood hopes to create a broader public awareness of the Indigenous peoples' history and to begin to build and repair the relationships with the Indigenous peoples in our community.

Settler colonialism is not a thing of the past, rather it still exists today as long as settlers – and their descendants – are living on appropriated land. Adopting a Land Acknowledgment encourages us all to think about what it means to occupy space on Indigenous lands and to acknowledge that all non-Indigenous people benefit from settler colonialism as it stands today. Acknowledgment demonstrates inclusion and commitment to beginning the process of working to dismantle the ongoing legacies of settler colonialism, honoring Indigenous communities, and starting to decolonize our gathering spaces.

Moving Beyond Land Acknowledgment

Although it is important to acknowledge the land, this acknowledgment is only a first step. Land Acknowledgments are small gestures and become meaningful when coupled with authentic relationships and informed action. As the City formally adopts this Land Acknowledgment, we also recognize its shortcomings. Colonialism is a current, ongoing process and we are mindful of our present participation.

The City takes this opportunity to recommit ourselves to lifting up Indigenous stories and cultures, and we seek to continue to build a stronger foundational relationship between the City and the local Indigenous communities. Through community engagement, we intend to continue to be responsive to the local Indigenous communities.

In order to move beyond land acknowledgment towards informed meaningful actions, the City intends to take the following next steps:

- Access to Land: Partner with Indigenous community members and organizations to make land available to Indigenous peoples for cultural events and gatherings.
- Cultivate Community Education: Highlight Indigenous arts and culture and cultivate community education as an active way to combat erasure and uplift Indigenous history and current narratives.
- Relationship Building: Continue to explore the relationship between the City and the local Indigenous communities and actions the City can take to address the needs of the Indigenous community members.

These were a few of the recommendations that came from listening sessions held on July 28, 2021 and August 12, 2021 as part of the City's Climate Action and Adaptation Plan community outreach. The listening sessions were led by Pueblo Planning, in partnership with the Sacred Places Institute for Indigenous Peoples. Tongva and other Indigenous community members who live in the region participated in the listening sessions.

As the City continues to work on building relationships with Indigenous communities, we will continue to develop actionable next steps to recognize the Indigenous peoples, educate the community, and support tribal land stewardship.

Acknowledgments

The City of West Hollywood would like to recognize and thank Tina Calderon, a Tongva Culture Bearer, for providing guidance and feedback on the Land Acknowledgment.

The City also incorporated comments from the listening sessions with Tongva and other Indigenous community members hosted by Sacred Places Institute as part of the engagement for the Climate Action and Adaptation Plan.

Resources and Further Reading

The following resources were used to develop this Land Acknowledgment Policy. They provide more information on Land Acknowledgments, why they are important, and how we move beyond land acknowledgments to building meaningful relationships.

Cal State University of San Marcos, "Land Acknowledgment: You're on California Indian Land, Now What?: Acknowledging Relationships to Space and Place Toolkit", https://www.csusm.edu/cicsc/land.pdf

U.S. Department of Arts and Culture, "Honor Native Land: A Guide and Call to Acknowledgment", https://usdac.us/nativeland

Native Governance Center, "Beyond Land Acknowledgment: A Guide", https://nativegov.org/news/beyond-land-acknowledgment-guide/

Native Governance Center, "A Guide to Indigenous Land Acknowledgment", https://nativegov.org/news/a-guide-to-indigenous-land-acknowledgment/

"Native Land Acknowledgments are Not the Same as Land", https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-08-12/native-land-stewardship-needs-to-follow-acknowledgment

The following resources were used to outline the history of Tovaangar and the Tongva and Kizh people:

"A Brief History of LA's Indigenous Tongva People", https://laist.com/news/la-history/a-brief-history-of-the-tongva-people, accessed December 28, 2021.

"Mapping the Tongva Villages of L.A.'s past", https://www.latimes.com/projects/la-me-tongva-map/, accessed December 28, 2021.

An Introduction to UCLA's Indigenous Past, Present and Future, https://newsletter.alumni.ucla.edu/connect/2020/feb/tongva/default.htm?fbclid=IwAR3rJEJRhb8xwi2v0L1b7AxGtNUDV37sZRaX6LqtpkgGpEo-8h9FUFxY3oQ, accessed December 28, 2021.

History Department Acknowledgement of the Tongva and Greater Indigenous Lands occupied by the University of Southern California, https://dornsife.usc.edu/assets/sites/527/docs/USC_Department_of_History_Acknowledgement_of_Tongva_Lands_2021.pdf, accessed December 28, 2021.