

Duluth Indigenous Commission
Monday, September 15, 2025
411 W 1st St, Room 430 City Hall

Commissioners present: Phoebe Davis, Rene Ann Goodrich, Lenelle Hrabik

Commissioners absent: Natalie Smith

Commission applicant: Amber Lightfeather

Staff present: Hannah Figgins, Suzanne Kelley, Marsha Lue – Human Rights and Equity Officer

Note: Ojibwe language words are used in the meeting minutes. Gegit is used to indicate that the Commission has come to a consensus in support of the motion.

1. Call to Order and Introductions

- Chair Davis called the meeting to order at 5:38 PM. Introductions were made.

2. Approval of June 16, 2025 Meeting Minutes

- June 16, 2025 minutes were approved.
Motion passed: Gegit - All.

3. Public Comment

- none

4. City Reports and Updates

- Board/Commission Liaison Updates
 - Duluth Public Arts Commission – none
- Other Updates/Comments from City Councilors or city staff
 - Councilor Awal:
 - Provided her background and experience with UMD. She explained this is her last year on council and wanted to focus on City initiatives.
 - In response to the commissioners questions about the approval process for Indigenous commissioners applications that are outstanding this past year. Councilor Awal shared, as Personnel Chair, she wants to make the appointment process and functionality for commissions easier. She explained the appointment process:
 - The application is sent to the City Clerk's office, then it is sent to the City Department for review by the Department Head and it is sent to the Mayor's office for review. After the review, the Mayor's office makes the recommendation to City Council for appointment. There are some instances where interviews or additional questions are asked.
 - She is working with the City Clerk's office on making the application process easier. She will work to expedite Lightfeather's application.
 - Commissioner Goodrich commented on the disproportionate vacancies on the indigenous commission compared to other commissions and asked for city council support in approving applications.

- Councilor Awal is also looking at consolidation efforts for different commissions. One example was looking at combining the Public Arts and Heritage Preservation Commissions, but they could not be combined due to legislation. She is looking at all commissions and will bring her recommendations to the Mayor this fall.
- She stated that the Disability Commission, NQT2SLGBIA Commission, African Heritage Commission and Indigenous Commissions have been struggling to make quorum, so they are being reviewed for a different structure that would be composed of committees rather than commissions.
- Commissions have strict meeting requirements, while committees have greater flexibility.
- The Human Rights Commission would be the appointing body that would vote, approve and vet applicants for these Perspective Based committees.
- Councilor Awal stated she would be glad to meet one on one with different commission members to discuss the proposal.
- Commissioner Goodrich shared the Indigenous Commission have been meeting regularly and have the ability to call special meeting if need be, however additional commissioners approved would help our efforts to reduce barriers, and help ensure meeting quorum.
- The Commission thanked the Councilor for her presentation and asked for the proposal to be formally typed and presented to the Commission. The Commission also requested more clarification about the appointment process and asked for support for the Indigenous Commission. Specifically, they asked why the appointments to the commission have not been made when people have applied. They asked for her support approving applications. They also stated the Indigenous identification is a political entity not an identity-based designation.

5. New Business

- Bardon's Peak Interpretative Marker- draft language was presented to the Commission. The following includes the amendments proposed by the Commission:
 - Bardon's Peak Overlook

The St. Louis River's rich natural resources have supported settlements for thousands of years. As part of the Anishinaabe's ancestral lands, it was used for transportation, food sources like wild rice (manoomin), and as a central location for trade and settlement. The present-day neighborhoods were built as a result of industries that began locating along the river in the 1800s.

Bardon's Peak now known as Spirit Mountain is called in Anishinaabe Manidoo Wajiw. The name originates from traditional Anishinaabe / Ojibwe stories. The land base is included as part of ceded territories of the 1854 Treaty with the Anishinaabe Nation and the US government. The Anishinaabe / Ojibwe regarded the peak and surrounding mountain area as a significant cultural, spiritual, and sacred site and used the peak as a gathering place, a place for ceremony, and as an observation point during conflicts prior

to the Treaty Era. James Bardon moved to the area in 1857 and was very active in civic and political pursuits and for a time owned the land here that used to bear his name.

- Motion passed: Gegit - All.
- Indigenous People's Day event planning- October 13
 - The permit has been submitted for the front steps of City Hall. The Mayor has agreed to read the proclamation at the event.
 - City staff recommended Commissioners reach out to the permitting office to request the building is open for use in case of rain and to make bathrooms available for attendees.
 - Enger Tower will be lit in the color orange at commissioners request again this year along with the Aerial Lift Bridge request will be submitted on the City website by commissioners.
 - Harbor City asked if the event could be moved to 10:00 am for students.
 - Invites have been sent out to Duluth Council by commissioners
 - Members want to create a Land Acknowledgement for the City of Duluth. They requested assistance from Dr. Lue.
 - The language for the press release has been prepared.
 - The poster is still being made, and Commissioners moved to allow a vote on the poster via email.
 - Motion passed: Gegit - All.

6. Action Items

- Ojibwe Language Pronunciation Guide and Signs in City Hall (Goodrich, DPAC)
 - There may be concerns about this project, but there may be an opportunity for a different project. The Commission wants to work closely with the Mayor's office on new art ideas.
 - Commissioners will connect with DPAC due to the change of the project.
 - Commissioners request a memo about the next steps of the allocated funds.

7. Ongoing Business

- None

8. Subcommittees

- Education (Lightfeather) –
 - Working with school administration, however there are concerns about budget process.
- Full Moon Ceremonies (Davis) – Dates were provided for the ceremonies; they will begin when it starts getting dark. Natalie Smith is also working on the ceremonies.
- Housing (Hrabik) – HRA applied for "Bring it Home" which are vouchers from the State of Minnesota Housing, however it is hard to find places that will accept vouchers. HRA also opened new units in Harbor Highlands.
- Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Relatives (MMIWR) (Goodrich) – Commissioner Goodrich updated some cases

- Shiela St. Clair's case continues, she is the inspiration for the local Duluth Gaagige Mikwendaagoziwag Reward fund. The Reward fund is still active and the local committee is working on 2025 strategies moving forward. More updates to come
- Goodrich will also be providing an update about this reward to City Council.
- Sobriety Feast (Davis) – Commissioner Smith is working on this event with Native Lives Matter.

9. Announcements

- Indigenous Peoples Day – Monday October 13

10. Next meeting: October 20, 2025.

Meeting adjourned at 7:35 pm

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES DAY 2025

Monday October 13, 2025 - Duluth Minnesota

10:00am ~ 12:30pm at Duluth City Hall

Hosted By: Indigenous Commission of the City of Duluth

**In honor & recognition of Indigenous Peoples, their rich history, sovereignty, culture, traditional & contemporary knowledge, art, music, countless contributions, service past and present, stewardship to the natural environment
Indigenous Peoples make to the world**

City of Duluth will be lighting Enger Tower & Duluth Aerial Bridge Orange in recognition of Indigenous Peoples Day 2025

**Traditional Opening Ceremony & Designated Staff
City of Duluth Proclamation: Duluth Mayor Roger J. Reinert
Speakers ~ Community Leaders ~ Presentations ~ Honoring ~
Drum and Singers ~ Youth Leaders ~ Community Round Dance
Red & Orange Shirt Public Art Displays ~ Youth Led Art Project**

Event Link: www.facebook.com/share/1CQAQN9McR/

**Event Supported by: City of Duluth MN, Indigenous Commission,
Community Partners and Leaders, Native Lives Matter Coalition,
Duluth Gaagige-Mikwendaagoziwag**

Artist: Michelle Waabanangagokwe Defoe



**MENDING THE
SACRED HOOP**



GAAGIGE-MIKWENDAAGOZIWA REWARD FUND “THEY WILL BE REMEMBERED FOREVER”

On January 14, 2022, the Gaagige-Mikwendaagoziwag “They Will Be Remembered Forever” Reward Fund was created with the city of Duluth, Mending the Sacred Hoop and the Native Lives Matter Coalition.

All funds raised will be used to encourage those with information on the missing to report.

In August of 2015, Sheila St Clair went missing from Duluth, MN. Last seen on the 100 block of West 3rd St, the investigation is still open with the Duluth Police Department. The Gaagige-Mikwendaagoziwag Fund was conceived in her honor, to assist in bringing Sheila and other missing relatives home. Anyone with information on Sheila St. Clair can contact the DPD Violent Crime Unit: 218-730-5050.



Donations to the Reward Fund by check can be sent to:
Gaagige-Mikwendaagoziwag
c/o Woodlands National Bank
240 North Road, Cloquet, MN 55720

www.mshoop.org

REWARD

Sheila St. Clair



Last seen in August 2015 in Duluth, MN



Reward money will be given for
information leading to the
resolution of this case

Call the Duluth Police Department's Violent Crimes Unit
at (218)-730-5050 if you have any information