

Oliver Renaming Project: What We've Heard

January 2022 to March 2023

Prepared for the Oliver Community League
by the Heartstage Consulting Team, March 2023



Introduction

What is now known as the neighbourhood of Oliver has a long history as a gathering place for Indigenous Communities. For centuries Nehiyaw (Cree) Plains peoples lived, hunted, bartered, built relationships, and stewarded the land. While the Papaschase Nation largely inhabited this land, many other nations would visit for connecting, trade, and building kinship. Similarly, the Métis would be in this area during their buffalo hunts as well to connect and engage with the Cree Plains peoples. Kinship with one another, the land, and animals was as important for Indigenous peoples as it is today. More recently, the area has a rich history of Indigenous governance and community building. Over the years, it has housed several Indigenous organizations and political advocacy groups such as the Métis Association and the Native Friendship Centre.

In 1922, the area was established as the West End Community League. In 1937, the neighbourhood and community league was re-named Oliver, following the naming of Oliver School, both named after Frank Oliver. Today Oliver is a vibrant community full of residential areas, shops, businesses, and schools. The people who make up this neighbourhood come from a variety of backgrounds and walks of life.

Project Background

This initiative to identify a new name for the neighbourhood began formally in the summer of 2020 when, in response to community feedback and calls to action to change the name over the years, the Oliver Community League Board voted to oppose the name “Oliver” and find a new one.

“The Oliver Community League Board of Directors opposes the name “Oliver” for our community because its namesake, Frank Oliver, spearheaded many harmful policies that directly targeted Indigenous communities, people of colour, newcomers, and people with disabilities. This namesake does not reflect the spirit of diversity and inclusion that our community represents”.

As a result, the Oliver Community League, led by Indigenous communities, initiated the #UncoverOliver campaign focused on raising awareness of the need for the name change. The campaign ran for several months, educating the community as to who its namesake, Frank Oliver, was, his recorded actions, and why the name came to be - uncovering the history of the community. The league also began working with community residents and the City of Edmonton to develop a process to decide on a new name for the neighbourhood.

In the fall of 2021, the league began working with a team of consultants to develop a public engagement process to support the league in finding a name to best represent the community. The engagement process included gathering input from community members and creating a Renaming Circle to guide the process and co-create potential names.

Going forward, the final name suggestion will be shared with the City of Edmonton's Naming Committee and City Council for final approval. For more information, visit the project webpage: <https://www.uncoveroliver.ca/> or contact info@olivercommunity.com.

Timeline

A note on the timelines: Engagement unfolded at the pace of community. It was important not to rush, to give time to the process, and to work in a way that balanced volunteer schedules of OCL board members, community member and Renaming Circle member schedules, and the consultants' schedules. This project also unfolded during the COVID-19 pandemic, and ways of working together and engaging were shifting from remote, to in-person, to hybrid. The Renaming Circle felt good about this way of working, and appreciated that the process was given the time it needed.

- 2020: Oliver Community League votes to oppose the name "Oliver" and find a new name
- 2020: #UnCover Oliver Campaign launches

- Fall 2021: Oliver Community League begins working with the Heartstage Consulting Team to develop a public engagement process
- January/February 2022: Pre-engagement begins
- June 2022: the Renaming Circle begins to meet
- July-September 2022: Oliver Renaming Community Engagement
- September 2022-February 2023: Renaming Circle meetings to deliberate a new name
- February 2023: Pipe Ceremony to close the process
- April 2023: New name is shared with OCL Board

Public Engagement Process

1. Pre-Engagement

Pre-engagement was conducted in January/February 2022 to identify who should be part of the Renaming Circle, gauge interest in the project, and inform how best to engage with the community.

2. Oliver Community League Renaming Circle

The Renaming Circle was created with the purpose of working with the Oliver Community League (OCL) to co-create the path for engaging the Indigenous community and broader public in identifying new potential names for the Oliver neighbourhood. The Circle supported the analysis of information gathered through engagement, and helped co-create potential names.

The goal was to give as much agency as possible to the Renaming Circle to guide the process of identifying a new name for the Oliver Community League. It was important to the Oliver Community League, and to the process, that the Renaming Circle was Indigenous-centered and included a majority of Indigenous perspectives. It was also important to include perspectives from several of the racialized communities impacted by Frank Oliver's policies and legacies.

The project team took a relationship-based and snowball approach to convening the Renaming Circle. Invitations were extended to a range of individuals and organizations. The OCL

Renaming Circle would have the following composition: 10 to 12 community members including but not limited to: 1 to 2 Elders; Indigenous community members & leaders especially from neighbouring First Nations and Métis settlements; members of communities impacted by Frank Oliver, such as the Black community, newcomers, and people with disabilities; general public members; 1 to 2 OCL members; and 1 to 2 City of Edmonton members.

The Renaming Circle meetings were a space for sharing stories, teachings, knowledge and history. **Twelve (12) people participated in Renaming Circle meetings over the course of its activities.** They are: members of the Oliver community, Indigenous leaders, Elders, and other community leaders. The members were identified and selected in a variety of ways: they are leaders in their communities who have been largely impacted by the legacy of Frank Oliver, were involved in the early stages of the process, or were approached because of their knowledge of the land, community, and history. Some of the invited individuals and organizations declined to participate based on capacity or interest. The Renaming Circle members were finalized with those who had the capacity and time to participate in the journey. Participants brought perspectives to the table informed by their informal and formal connections to a diversity of communities and organizations including: Michel Band, St. Albert-Sturgeon County Metis Local #1904 and broader Métis communities, Samson-Cree, Papaschase (both First Nation and First Nation #136), Edmonton's Chinese community (including ties to the Chinese Benevolent Association and Chinatown Transformation Collaborative), and Black and Amber Valley settlers.

The Renaming Circle began meeting monthly in June 2022, and met five (5) times between June 2022 and February 2023. The Renaming Circle also gathered for two pipe ceremonies, one to open the process in a good way, and one to close the process and reflect on the final proposed name.

Participants included: Jo-Ann Saddleback, Jerry Saddleback, Carola Cunningham, Gary Gairdner, Emily Riddle, Maureen Callihoo Ligtvoet, Vernon Hagen, Junetta Jamerson, Lan Chan-Marples, George Quinn, Chief Bruneau, and a rotating representative of the Oliver Community League (Robyn Paches, Robyn Wilson, Carrie-Anne Cyre).

Invitations to participate were also extended to individuals involved with foundational work on the #UnCover Oliver campaign (including Hunter Cardinal, Jodi Calahoo-Stonehouse, Brent Oliver (descendent of Frank Oliver), and individuals representing Alexander First Nation and Enoch Cree First Nation.

Summary of Renaming Circle Conversations: The focus of the first half of meetings was on relationship building, learning the long history of the Oliver area, developing a renaming process that honours the history, the land, and the people who have resided in and who currently live in the neighbourhood. It was important to the members that they understand the history of the neighbourhood properly - before and after settlers arrived. Elder Jerry Saddleback was generous in sharing the stories about use of the Oliver area by different Indigenous peoples as a sanctuary, due to its food sources and location for trade purposes. Key to the process was capturing the stories in these meetings to share with the residents of Oliver and be accountable to the community. Elder Jo-Ann Saddleback shared how important the neighbourhood was as an abundant area and critical hub to gather for barter and trade for several nations and tribes. The latter half of meetings focused on hearing the themes that came up from public engagement, discussing ideas based on that input, the Renaming Circle participants' own reflections, and finally brainstorming and coming to a consensus through ceremony on a proposed new neighbourhood name. Coming to conclusion after five meetings and two pipe ceremonies, the Renaming Circle reflected upon the engagement results, what would the future look like after the renaming process and how the new name can bring everyone together.

3. Oliver Community Engagement

Residents of Oliver were invited to share their ideas via an online submission form, Oliver School students and staff were consulted, and two in-person engagements were held at community events in 2022. To invite participation and discussion, postcards were mailed out through Canada Post to every residence and business in the neighbourhood and the information was shared through the Oliver Community League's social media channels and e-newsletter. People were invited to share their ideas via an online submission form or by attending two community events. Over 100 people shared ideas, comments and questions. The in person engagement took place at the OCL 100 Celebration in Ezio Faraone Park on August 27, 2022, and Art in the Park at Paul Kane Park on September 29, 2022. Oliver School students and staff shared their ideas, with help from the Principal and teachers at Oliver School - the students shared several drawings and artistic creations with the engagement team and are shared below. OCL volunteers also reached out directly to several businesses with "Oliver" in their name.

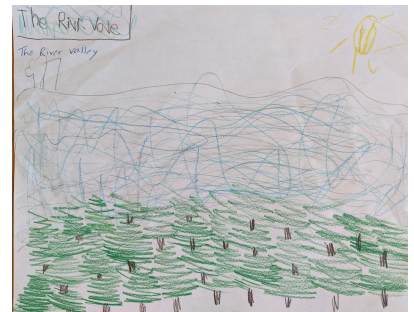
Engagement Feedback

Oliver Community Engagement Themes

- Over 100 responses were submitted between August 16 to September 30, 2022.
- 70% of respondents would like to see a new name.
- 30% of respondents want to see a name with Indigenous significance.
- 30% of respondents thought the name should remain as Oliver, for a variety of reasons.
- Most respondents were residents, some go to school, work or frequent businesses in the neighbourhood. 5 classes of primary school students at Oliver School also shared ideas. Some of the ideas and themes shared by the students were:



- Sense of community and/or unity
- Reconciliation
- Playing and enjoying time with friends
- River Valley / green space
- Kindness
- Friendly neighbours and people
- Enjoying the amenities (parks, Oliver Pool, businesses)
- OCL volunteers reached out to a number of businesses in the neighbourhood for their thoughts on a new name. Not all businesses returned phone calls or left feedback via email or Google Form. Several businesses signed letters of support for the renaming process which can be found in the renaming application.
- Some of the things that people value about the neighbourhood are:
 - Location (proximity to downtown, central, amenities, unique, small/local businesses, convenience)
 - The sense of community (people, friends, neighbours)
 - Diverse demographics
 - Nature (river and river valley, trees, greenery, parks)
 - Walkability
- Key themes for a new neighbourhood name:
 - Consider the natural landscape.
 - Showcase community, place and history.
 - Connect the name to the Indigenous culture and histories of this land.
 - Do use a single word or a name with no more than three syllables.
 - Don't use the name of a historic or living person.
 - Don't erase history.



The Proposed New Neighbourhood Name:

Wîhkwêntowin - ᐃᐱᐱᑦᑲᑦᑲᑦᑲᑦᑲᑦ

At their final two meetings, the Renaming Circle narrowed down name ideas, through a process of considering the feedback from broad community engagement, sharing stories and history, listening to each other, using a voting process within the Renaming Circle, and then concluding the process with a final pipe ceremony. Over a dozen names were considered by the Renaming Circle in their last meeting, with the final decision being between three potential names. The vote was taken with each member of the Renaming Circle placing stickers next to their pick for the best names. In reflecting on the final decision, Lan Chan Marples related how even as people join or leave, a circle does not break, a powerful metaphor for the enduring nature of our community and the values we uphold together. Whether it was sheltering people in circular encampments, geese sheltering their young in a circle of adults, Chinese traditions of eating together in a circle, and even the Renaming Circle itself, the image of a circle of friends had echoed through the previous meetings.

The final proposed new name is **Wîhkwêntôwin** in nêhiyawêwin. The syllabics are ᐃᐱᐱᑦᑲᑦᑲᑦᑲᑦᑲᑦ - and in English translates to 'Circle of Friends'.

This name reflects:

- The importance of honouring the deep history and sacredness of this place, modern history, the present, and also moving forward into the future.
- The area as a sanctuary, gathering place, place of welcome and transition, a hub for many nations, tribes and languages, a place of hunting, fishing, and trade.
- The neighbourhood as a birthing place for modern Indigenous history, from being a place for the beginnings of Native Friendship Centres, a place of Métis association, and a gathering place for more recent Indigenous political activity.
- The circle is a powerful symbol for different cultures and contexts, from geese gathering in a circle to protect each other, to circular encampments (Circle Encampment People - Papaschase Encampment), to Chinese cultural connections (you eat in a circle,

Next Steps

- The final suggestion for a new name will be brought forward by the Oliver Community League to the City of Edmonton's Naming Committee.

Appendix

[Community Engagement Questions](#)

[Promotional Postcard](#)

[Pre-Engagement Report](#)

[Engagement Process & Results](#)

[Renaming Circle Guiding Document](#)

[FAQs](#)

