

CITY OF ALBUQUERQUE
COMMISSION OF AMERICAN INDIAN & ALASKA NATIVE AFFAIRS

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September 20, 2021

Mayor Timothy M. Keller
Office of the Mayor
1 Civic Plaza, 11th Floor
Albuquerque, NM 87102

Re: Recommendations on Albuquerque Indian Boarding School Cemetery Site/4-H Park

Dear Mayor Keller,

This memorandum intends to provide you with an overview of the information, discussions, and recommendations of the Commission on American Indian and Alaska Native Affairs (“Commission”) regarding the Albuquerque Indian Boarding School Cemetery Site, also recognized as the 4-H Park.

1. Overview

As you know, on June 29, the City’s Park and Recreation Department and Office of Native American Affairs was notified that a plaque at the Albuquerque Indian Boarding School Cemetery/4-H Park, denoting the area as the final resting place for Zuni, Apache, and Navajo students from the Albuquerque Indian School, was missing. The Commission continues working with the City’s Park and Recreation Department, Office of Native American Affairs, on gathering information from individuals with direct/indirect information of the burials, and participated representing the City of Albuquerque in an initial stakeholder meeting to gather community input and recommendations. The City, through your Office, the Office of Native American Affairs, and the Commission, continues to engage in government-to-government consultation with Tribes originally identified and other tribal nations within the state. The City, via Mr. Terry Sloan continues to be in contact with the All Pueblo Council of Governors, the New Mexico Indian Affairs Department, and the Department of Interior via Secretary Deb Haaland. We thank you, Mayor Keller, for your continued attention to this important issue, consideration of our recommendations, and we look forward to working with you to implement meaningful and comprehensive next steps.

2. Background

In response to the announced confirmation of the remains of 215 Indigenous children at the Kamloops Indian Residential School in Canada, there have been recent international, national and local calls for acknowledgement, investigation, and resolution of the legacy impacts of Indian Boarding Schools on generations of Tribal Nations, communities, and families across Canada and the United States.

CITY OF ALBUQUERQUE

COMMISSION OF AMERICAN INDIAN & ALASKA NATIVE AFFAIRS

From the 1860s until the 1970s, the U.S. Government intentionally funded and operated over 500 Indian Boarding Schools, overseen by 12 Christian denominations, with the sole intention of expediting the assimilation and erasure of Native people from their identity, culture, beliefs, language and land. Our City of Albuquerque was not immune and participated in the operation of one of these Indian Boarding Schools, namely the Albuquerque Indian Boarding School (AIS) from 1860s to 1982 the AIS received Native children and staff from surrounding Pueblos and Native Nations from within and outside of New Mexico under this federal assimilation policy. Consequently, due to harmful federal policies that were implemented, many Native children and staff died while at the school, away from their families and community, never to return home.

Today, we know and understand, more than any other time in our collective history, the effects of trauma on the brain, the individual, the family, a community, and specific populations. We know now through research findings how historical trauma, intergenerational trauma, and ongoing trauma have lasting impacts and enduring challenges yet to be addressed and resolved, especially among the Native American population. We must continue to address and resolve these challenges, first by understanding how systems and policies continue to perpetuate racism and harm, and second by changing systems and policies so all Native people and People of Color live in safety, thrive and heal.

It is the opinion of the CAIANA that the City of Albuquerque has an obligation to its Native residents, and its government-to-government relationships with the Tribes of New Mexico to make the Albuquerque Indian School Cemetery Site a place to be treated with respect and reverence, out of respect for the Native students, the staff who attended, and their descendants. We believe Native residents of Albuquerque deserve this outcome that needs to be recognized and supported with respect, diligence and care. The lasting harmful effects of negative Federal Indian Policies, such as Indian Boarding Schools, in our nation needs to acknowledge and resolution provided to Native people and tribal nations through the continuation and support of their health, culture, and well-being.

3. Commission Participation and Initial Information Gathering

Per the City's tribal consultation policy, the City via Mr. Terry Sloan has contacted the eight Tribal nations originally identified with information on the issue and an invitation to engage in **ongoing** consultation. The City has also contacted the remaining Tribal nations in the state. Mr. Sloan has provided and continues to provide ongoing monthly updates to this Commission and the Mayor regarding the status of Tribal responses.

From information provided to the Commission by the City's Parks and Recreation Department, Office of Native American Affairs, and individuals, we have determined the following:

- Information regarding the of the number of individuals buried and their location at the 4H site is inconclusive;
- There are an additional 73 unmarked plots located at the Fairview Cemetery related to the AIS burials, possibly including a couple of superintendents, staff, others;
- Disease and sickness contributed heavily to the cause of deaths;

CITY OF ALBUQUERQUE

COMMISSION OF AMERICAN INDIAN & ALASKA NATIVE AFFAIRS

- Many burials took place because deceased were far from home, i.e. Zuni Pueblo, Hopi (Arizona), Mescalero, Ute (Colorado), and Pima (Arizona);
- Some burials are said to be staff, employees of the Indian School and individuals, including infants that died at the Indian Hospital nearby;
- The 4-H site was acquired by the City;
- The Indian Pueblo Cultural Center had tried to re-acquire the site but were unsuccessful;
- Tribal nations were contacted, especially those named in reports, but only one response has been received; and
- There are two issues, 1) Tribal consultation as to the remains and ceremony, and 2) determining what the 4-H Park should become.

A stakeholder session facilitated by Kathleen Oweegon of “Bridges of Peace,” in which Commission members attended, was conducted in a virtual zoom session on August 10th with twenty-one participants representing community organizations with connections to the site. The ***4H Park Burial Site August 10, 2021 Stakeholder’ Meeting Report*** can be found online here <https://www.cabq.gov/parksandrecreation/documents/4h-park-burial-site-8-10-21-stakeholders-meeting-1-report.pdf>. Although the session gathered responses from the participants, some stakeholders were not present. Here are general themes that have emerged:

- Community ceremony(ies) must take place for healing;
- The plaques must be replaced;
- The 4-H park should become a memorial park;
- An assessment and more information should be gathered;
- Tribal consultation should continue; and
- Funding should be provided by the city to conduct the on-going work.

4. Commission Recommendations

Based on the considerations above, the Commission requests your utmost consideration of the recommendations outlined below as an initial response to this most complex and imperative issue. These initial recommendations will continue to be inclusive of information provided by national, state and local experts as it becomes available. A list of contact and references are provided with this memo should you like to reach out for further information.

A. Acknowledgement and recognition by the City of Albuquerque and City Council of the history of the Albuquerque Indian Boarding School and associated cemetery/burial sites.

Immediate Steps – Pass a City Resolution acknowledging the history of the AIS and cemetery/burial sites, with a commitment to working with Native leaders and residents to ensure this part of Albuquerque and New Mexico’s history is never forgotten.

Long-Term Expectations – Commitment to equitably fund health and community initiatives that directly impact and improve the health and well-being of Native residents of Albuquerque impacted by federal Indian Boarding School policies and practices.

CITY OF ALBUQUERQUE

COMMISSION OF AMERICAN INDIAN & ALASKA NATIVE AFFAIRS

B. Conduct and complete a comprehensive assessment of the Albuquerque Indian School (AIS) Cemetery Site at 4-H Park and other related AIS burial sites (i.e. Fairview Cemetery) within the City of Albuquerque.

Immediate Steps – Establish a committed working group to gather, analyze, and assess all historic and current information and documentation related to Albuquerque Indian School burials and cemetery sites. This working group should be Native-led and include historical and cultural experts. Individuals to be considered for the working group should be appointed by the Commission through an application process and compensated for their time and service.

Long-Term Expectations – This working group is to develop a comprehensive history, recommendations on next steps, and report to be delivered to the Mayor of Albuquerque, City Council and the Commission. This report should be accessible by the public at the time of delivery. This will enable direct access to the history and documents and ensure transparency.

C. The Albuquerque Indian School Cemetery Site/4-H Park needs to be recognized as a sacred site and memorialized as a part of the larger City of Albuquerque’s shared history.

Immediate Steps – Continuation and completion of stakeholder input and consultation by groups that include the following, but not limited to:

- Native residents of the City of Albuquerque
- Native-led community organizations, organizers, and advocates
- Native-led programs who provide mental and behavioral health services to Native residents of Albuquerque
- Relevant City of Albuquerque stakeholders and groups connected to the burial site(s)
- Tribal nations whose members and relatives are connected to the AIS and cemetery/burial site(s)
- Albuquerque Indian School alumni/attendees
- Native youth leaders and elders
- Native thought leaders and artists

Stakeholder meetings are to be by invitation or made public, as appropriate, and conducted in a manner that is culturally-relevant and safe for all individuals to express their viewpoint and input using expert facilitators and community-engaged practices. All processes and information collected and recorded need to be transparent with a dedicated website and social media platform that is easily accessed by the public.

Long-Term Expectations – The collection of input by the various stakeholders are to be compiled into a comprehensive report. A strategic plan is to be developed and implemented to carry out unifying recommendations as to the future recognition and remembrance of the Albuquerque Indian School Cemetery Site/4-H Park history.

CITY OF ALBUQUERQUE

COMMISSION OF AMERICAN INDIAN & ALASKA NATIVE AFFAIRS

- D. Commitment to working with Native Nations/Pueblos and stakeholders to develop a comprehensive and culturally-relevant curriculum on the history of the AIS, Native Americans in New Mexico and the Southwest so students in the Albuquerque Public School district and across New Mexico can learn about the history of the school, present day situations, contributions and challenges Native Americans face in the twenty-first century.**
- E. Commitment to developing and implementing a strategic plan to address issues, concerns, and health disparities Native residents of Albuquerque face due to the impacts of historical trauma and racism. This plan will identify short and long-term goals in relation to education, economy, environment, health care, intergovernmental relations with all Native Nations/Pueblos in the state, and the homeless population.**
- F. Establishment of a Native American Affairs department with a director and staff, and necessary resources to help build and implement a strong and committed relationship with Native people living in the City and surrounding areas.**
- G. Expand and work with Native residents and Native-led organizations of Albuquerque to develop a Native American Center that will further support and promote the continuation of Native culture and community. This central place for Native residents to gather should be developed by stakeholders to ensure facilities and land can be accessed for language and cultural classes, culturally-relevant activities, community celebrations, resources and information, conferences and gatherings, and to develop connections for stronger relationships with other urban Native communities and Tribes.**
- H. Equitable support for the Commission to continue its work and service with a dedicated City staff person and resources to ensure sustainability. Currently, the Commission does not have a dedicated City staff person. This assistance would help to coordinate information coming to and from the Commission and would enable Commission members to focus on their primary task.**

In closing, we ask you to deeply consider and participate meaningfully in these recommendations as we continue to receive updates as further input and information is provided by tribal nations and other stakeholders.

In Service,



Ms. Rebecca Riley
CAIANA Chairperson

CITY OF ALBUQUERQUE

COMMISSION OF AMERICAN INDIAN & ALASKA NATIVE AFFAIRS

cc:

Terry Sloan, CABQ Office of Equity and Inclusion Intergovernmental Tribal Liaison

Dawn Begay, Office of Equity and Inclusion Native American Affairs Coordination