



Policy Name: Sacred Fire Policy	Policy No: S500-09
Council approval date:	August 5, 2026
Revision date(s):	-
Department/Division:	Fire Services

1. Purpose

- 1.1. The purpose of this policy is to affirm the Town of Pelham's commitment to reconciliation, inclusivity, and respectful relationships with Indigenous Peoples by recognizing the cultural and spiritual significance of Sacred Fires and upholding the rights of Indigenous Peoples to conduct them.
- 1.2. This policy establishes a framework for the safe and respectful facilitation of Sacred Fires within the Town of Pelham. It also distinguishes Sacred Fires from recreational or open-air burning, ensuring that Indigenous cultural practices are recognized and accommodated without unnecessary regulatory barriers.
- 1.3. The Town recognizes that Indigenous Peoples and Nations maintain distinct cultural protocols, traditions, and teachings relating to Sacred Fires. This policy is intended to support those practices in a respectful and culturally appropriate manner, informed by ongoing dialogue, collaboration, and relationship-building with Indigenous communities.

2. Policy Statement

- 2.1. The Town of Pelham recognizes the cultural, spiritual, and ceremonial significance of Sacred Fires for Indigenous Peoples. Sacred Fires are distinct from recreational or open-air burning, and the Town affirms that supporting and accommodating them is consistent with the principles of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Calls to Action.

3. Scope

- 3.1. This policy applies to all Sacred Fires conducted on private property and at any Town-owned property designated for the purpose of conducting Sacred Fires.
- 3.2. The policy remains in effect during Fire Bans. Sacred Fires that are conducted in accordance with this policy, and are supervised by a Designated Person, are exempt from a Fire Ban and from the provisions of the Town Open-Air Burning By-law.



4. Definitions

4.1. In this policy:

“Designated Sacred Fire Site” means a location identified by the Town for the purpose of holding Sacred Fires and supporting Indigenous cultural, spiritual, ceremonial, and healing practices. Such locations may be situated on Town Property or on other lands made available for this purpose through agreement or authorization.

“Fire Ban” is a temporary restriction issued by the Town or Regional Municipality of Niagara that prohibits or limits open-air burning due to conditions that increase the risk of uncontrolled fire.

“Designated Person” means an individual identified by the Indigenous community and authorized to undertake responsibilities related to a Sacred Fire, including, where applicable, serving as the Fire Keeper. A Fire Keeper is responsible for tending to and maintaining the Sacred Fire in accordance with traditional Indigenous teachings, protocols, and practices.

“Person” means an individual, corporation, partnership, or association, formal or informal.

“Private Property” means any land or premises within the Town that is owned by a Person other than the Town, the Regional Municipality of Niagara, the Province of Ontario, or Canada.

“Sacred Fire” refers to a ceremonial fire lit by Indigenous People for sacred, cultural, spiritual or healing purposes. Sacred Fires may include, but are not limited to, funeral fires, prayer fires, community support or healing fires, teaching fires, and other ceremonies recognized within Indigenous traditions. Sacred Fires may be conducted over multiple consecutive days in accordance with Indigenous cultural protocols. A Designated Person is always present to tend the fire and ensure that traditional protocols are observed.

“Town” means the Corporation of the Town of Pelham or the geographic area of the municipality, as the context requires.

“Town Property” means any land or premises within the Town that are owned or occupied by the Town.

5. Sacred Fire Notification System

5.1. To support fire safety in the community, the Town has established an online Sacred Fire Notification System. This system allows Persons planning to hold



a Sacred Fire to notify the Town in advance. Notification enables Town staff to respond in a supportive manner to any public inquiries and helps ensure overall community safety.

- 5.2. The Town shall provide information on its website respecting Sacred Fires, including information regarding Fire Bans, the distinction between Sacred Fires and open-air burning, and contact information for submitting notifications.
- 5.3. Notification to the Fire Department must be provided during regular business hours (Monday to Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.), even when the Sacred Fire is scheduled to occur after hours, on weekends, or on statutory holidays.
- 5.4. If a Sacred Fire is required on short notice and notification is submitted outside of business hours, the Town will make reasonable efforts to review the notice on the next available business day. However, acknowledgment of receipt or communication to the Fire Department and other applicable authorities cannot be guaranteed until that time.
- 5.5. While use of the online system is encouraged, notification may also be provided by alternate means (such as telephone or email) if necessary, provided it includes all information required by subsection 5.6 of this policy.
- 5.6. The notification should include:
 - a. Start date and anticipated start time of the Sacred Fire;
 - b. Anticipated end date and time, if known, recognizing that the duration of some Sacred Fires may change in accordance with Indigenous cultural protocols;
 - c. Location (Private Property address or Town Property Sacred Fire site name);
 - d. Name and contact information of a designated contact person or individual responsible for ensuring the Sacred Fire is conducted in accordance with applicable Indigenous cultural protocols;
 - e. Any additional information voluntarily provided to assist the Town in responding to public inquiries and supporting community safety.
- 5.7. Notification under this policy is intended solely to inform the Town and Fire Department. It does not constitute a permit, approval, or authorization.



6. Safety Considerations

- 6.1. If an emergency fire call is placed through St. Catharines dispatch (911), rather than directly to the local Fire Department or By-law Services, fire crews will be dispatched and will attend the site regardless of prior Sacred Fire notification provided to the Town.
- 6.2. Sacred Fires must be conducted in a safe location on Private Property, or a Sacred Fire site on Town Property, using clean, natural wood that is free of chemicals or contaminants.
- 6.3. Subject to available resources and Council approval, the Town may provide or facilitate access to firewood or other supports for Sacred Fires held at Designated Sacred Fire Sites on Town Property.
- 6.4. Sacred Fires may remain in place for multiple days where required by Indigenous cultural protocols, including funeral fires, prayer fires, and community healing or support ceremonies, provided appropriate supervision and safety measures are maintained.
- 6.5. Sacred Fires must be contained and supervised at all times in accordance with the cultural protocols of those kindling the fire. Adequate means of extinguishment (e.g., water or sand) must be readily available.