

Letter to Mayor & Council re: Colonization Road

Please include in agenda and committee discussion around the signage issue.

Dear Mayor & Council:

I have been reading the discussion around colonization road with considerable interest.

I feel proud to be part of this community. It is clear that much thought has gone into so many of the letters published in the media. There is a lot of empathy for those who have suffered the growing pains of our country when social equality and cultural awareness were not given any weight. We still have a ways to go, but I believe more people are trying harder to understand the reasons why the past is so very hurtful to many. As long as we keep asking questions, making sincere efforts to educate ourselves, and reaching out to those who seem different, our community will continue to grow.

And isn't that the whole purpose of this discussion around colonization road?

Our town leadership has been working with our First Nations communities in order to better relationships between all of us. They recognize that the misunderstandings of the past have hurt us, not only emotionally and socially, but economically as well. We can only be stronger by working together. But creating a path forward can only happen if everyone is physically moving in that direction. Nothing important happens without effort. We can't take one or two steps and then stop. We need to keep putting one foot in front of another, and get back up should we stumble.

We can look at what happened in the States during the '60s when riots and demonstrations broke out over racial segregation and inequality. The results of that terrible time brought about some important changes to law, an important first step. Unfortunately we can be sure there were those who thought they'd done their part and could sit back and all would be well. But, for all who have watched the violence that has erupted across the US in this past year, it has been made crystal clear that little has improved for those of colour. Not enough people are taking those steps that can lead toward meaningful change.

I see from the letters to the Times that most of those who object to the name change do so for one of three reasons. Some, like our pensioners, simply can't afford it, but I believe it is an obstacle that can be overcome.

The second reason is that many would find the change too much trouble. This is a reasonable complaint. The process can be daunting. Perhaps we can work toward simplifying it. The Post Office used to give out ready-made postcards that one could drop in the mail. If these are no longer available, is it possible to make some? Can we also print off sheets of peel-and-stick address labels? Perhaps we can put together a small committee who can assist those who require this kind of assistance.

The third reason given is that there are those who feel that we should leave the past in the past. Unfortunately this isn't possible as our past is still with us and will continue to impact our future. Most of our First Nations communities are still dealing with the results of that past: loss of traditional lands, laws forbidding natives to compete for white jobs, and the residential school system that meant communities without children for generations. It has meant rampant poverty, lack of clean water, unemployable skills, loss of family structures, horrific addictions, loss of language and culture, and the list goes on.

So much was broken that it's impossible to leave the past in the past. Like a pillow broken in a wind storm, we simply cannot gather the feathers together again. Residents of Canada, if they care about their country and its future... if they care about its people, our greatest asset... must accept that there is work ahead. We must want to know about our past, learn from our past, and be willing to take continuous steps forward to make meaningful change where we can. It will be slow, but also soooo worth it.

To summarize... I am pleased to hear the town considering this step. Those things we value – like equality and social justice – require continual forward momentum that takes effort. Although there was much wrong in our shared past that cannot be righted, residential schools for example, other mistakes can be. The word “colonization” cannot be viewed favourably by those who lived here for thousands of years. Let's replace it with a name that gives representation to those who loved this land first.

Thank you for listening.

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