From: Ken Kellar
To: Cody Vangel
Subject: [External] Colonization Road name public input
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To Mr. Vangel and the sitting council of the Town of Fort Frances,

I would like to thank you for the opportunity to submit a letter with comments and a suggestion for a new name for the Colonization Roads we have here in Fort Frances. While you are all familiar with me as a reporter with the Fort Frances Times newspaper, I write this email to you today only as a private citizen living in this town, where I was born and raised.

I believe the Town has a somewhat unrecognized golden opportunity with the proposed name change to put into concrete action the pledge to honour and commit to the Calls to Action released by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. The town has the power to choose one name that is reflective of Anishinaabe people, language and culture and permanently make it part of our very fabric as a community, both as a physical landmark as well as symbolic of a renewed, strengthened relationship with our Indigenous neighbours and partners.

I would ask council and administration to heed the calls for such inclusive names, and to discard comments calling for the opposite from those who would choose to ignore the negative and damaging history of colonization in northwestern Ontario and across the rest of the country. We hear online and in print that new names for these roads need to be short, be english, be easy to spell, be familiar, or to honour legacies of the town. I charge that short need not be simple, english is already a melting pot of words from other languages, learning to spell new words is a lifelong necessity, what is 'other' can quickly become 'familiar' and that the legacy of our town has fallen short many times, so why not choose to include an entire group of people who make our culture and home so much more diverse and worthwhile than it would be without them.

I will grant that for the sake of emergency personnel, and the often miniscule boxes on government forms, that a shorter, easier to spell name is beneficial. However, I urge council to not fall into the trap of thinking in English, or to choose another Last Name Avenue. I present to you a selection of several words in Anishinaabemowin that are short and easier to spell, but are appropriate for roads and culturally inclusive.

1. Ziibi Road - 'Ziibi' is the Anishinaabemowin word for 'river' and highlights the importance the Rainy River has had to everyone in this town for more than one hundred years. The Rainy River served to bring Indigenous people together before colonization, allowed settlers to arrive in the area and trade with Indigenous people, and is to this day the pride of nearly everyone in the district who can drive along its lengths or enjoys fishing or playing in its waters. In execution, I would suggest this road for the current Colonization Road East, as it is directly against the river.

2. Amik Road - 'Amik' is the Anishinaabemowin word for 'beaver' and represents one of the most important animals in the history of the nation, as well as a loved mascot for the town in years past. The beaver was the cornerstone of early Canadian settlers, and we have the fur trade itself to thank for our outposts on Rainy Lake and the Rainy River (Fort St. Pierre and Fort Lac la Pluie). The animal has long been a staple of Indigenous culture as well, as it is the animal that represents "Wisdom," one of the Seven Grandfather or Sacred Teachings, making it worthwhile as a choice that represents both sides of the town's history. This choice would be appropriate for either road.

3. Makwa Road - 'Makwa' is the Anishinaabemowin word for the black bear, an animal anyone who lives in the district is very familiar with. The bear is also representative of "Bravery/Courage" which is another one of the Seven Grandfather Teachings. Let it be shown the Town of Fort Frances has the courage to do what is right and choose names that reflect our community as it is, not as the loudest minority wishes it to be. I believe the word is also an appropriate choice in terms of length and spelling for non-Anishinaabemowin speakers and readers. Again, this choice would be appropriate for either road.

As you can see, and hopefully as I have shown, there is ample opportunity for the Town of Fort Frances to recognize the importance of choosing a name that is reflective of the injustices of the past and is a firm commitment to recognizing and righting historical wrongs moving forward. These names are not of a length or spelling composition that is too much for those who make use of the road names to handle. They are simple in pronunciation so as to not confuse emergency personnel or hamper them in any way from attending a call. They are words in a language that has seen systematic attempts to destroy it and has thrived in recent years, thus creating a learning opportunity for those who live in town but who aren't faced with Anishinaabemowin on a frequent basis.

In conclusion, I urge the town of Fort Frances to adopt a name from this list or any other appropriate Anishinaabemowin submissions for use of at least one of the Colonization roads in Fort Frances. This is an opportunity for the town to show it is committed to reconciliation and bettering the relationship with Indigenous partners, and to acknowledge where we have fallen short in the past.

Respectfully yours,
- Ken Kellar