

From: Angie Ortlieb  
Sent: Thu 3/21/2019 7:49 PM  
To: Dave Barrow; Joe DiPaola; David West; Carmine Perrelli; Godwin Chan; Karen Cilevitz; Castro Liu; Tom Muench; Greg Beros; Clerks Richmondhill  
Subject: Land Acknowledgement Motion - Richmond Hill

March 15, 2019

Dear City Council of Richmond Hill,

I am not Indigenous. However, I am a community member who is continuing to learn the truth and to move forward on a path of reconciliation. This council was elected to represent all members of our community, and I am very uncomfortable with the response, from Deputy Mayor Joe DiPaola, to the land acknowledgment motion as outlined in the Richmond Hill Liberal. According to the article, DiPaola said:

*"I think it's too much emphasis on one fraction of our society when we have such a great number of different cultures that live here harmoniously. There is no acknowledgement of the Portuguese, the Italian community, the Chinese community, the Iranian community."*

*The deputy mayor also said it is not right to start every meeting with the proposed land acknowledgement because it "runs contrary" to the system of land registry title.*

*"I think we're treading down a course of political correctness," DiPaola said, and it would be "too much of a concession" if council starts every meeting with the recital of the statement.*

As a council, you have a great deal of responsibility in York Region and I believe as a community we can do better. These comments demonstrate there is a lack of understanding of the importance in differentiating Indigenous peoples from other cultural groups. Cree and Métis scholar, Verna St. Denis (2011) explains how "multiculturalism helps to erase, diminish, trivialize, and deflect from acknowledging Aboriginal sovereignty..." (p. 309). Indigenous peoples continue to occupy this land and never willingly surrendered their land nor rights. Equating Indigenous peoples with other cultural groups fails to acknowledge the specific experiences of Indigenous communities. (St. Denis, 2011). This is not about diminishing the contributions of the diverse cultural groups of Richmond Hill and Canada, but recognizing that we are all treaty people. If we are not Indigenous ourselves, we are settlers. This is certainly not about political correctness. It is about working towards better understanding, which will in turn improve our relationships.

According to the County of Simcoe Social and Community Services website, York Region had 5915 people who identified as Aboriginal in 2016. This was a 2330 increase from 2006, showing that we have a growing Indigenous population but also

that more people are newly identifying. We know that many people do not identify as Indigenous for various complex reasons including fear of discrimination and racism.

As a country, we have a responsibility to better understand our relationship to the land we call home and to respect the Indigenous Peoples that were here generations before the rest of us and continue to call this land home. I recommend that City Council revisit this motion and meet with Indigenous community members about drafting the land acknowledgement text. I also hope City Council will read all other Calls to Action put forward by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC).

I too am learning and “unlearning” about our history. I too am making efforts to learn from Indigenous colleagues, neighbours and friends. I am a teacher and recognize my great responsibility and the importance of working towards decolonizing. Along with other colleagues, I attend workshops and conferences provided by the Toronto District School Board (TDSB), the Elementary Teachers Federation of Ontario (ETFO), universities and community organizations such as the Native Canadian Centre of Toronto. I look to scholars such as Marie Battiste and Verna St. Denis. I partner with Indigenous educators as often as possible such as Suzanne Methot, Marianne Groat and Sheila Chichelnik. I attended the Indian Residential School Survivor event at Nathan Phillips Square this year, trying to add layers of knowledge to my understanding. I purchase books written by Indigenous authors. I have initiated a TRC committee composed of grade 5-8 students within my school. There is so much to learn and we are all a part of this process. As Marie Battiste, a Mi'kmaq academic says, it is our responsibility to learn:

Decolonization is a process that belongs to everyone. As such, it has huge implications and possibilities for re-imaging our relationships as envisioned in treaty and/or embedded within Canada's constitution. (Battiste, 2013, p. 9)

Much of this history was omitted from our own school and community experience, but now we have an opportunity to work towards reconciliation. The damaging effects of residential schools and the 60s scoop were an extreme violation of the treaties between sovereign nations and the Crown. The intergenerational trauma that has impacted families as a result of colonization is devastating. So it is more than history and relationships past, it is about respect and relationships today.

The fact that Richmond Hill has passed a motion to dedicate park space in honour of First Nations communities and the overwhelming turnout to the Secret Path event shows us that Richmond Hill wants to walk on this path towards reconciliation. Our community wants to learn and wants to do better. This is an opportunity for our leaders to take the next step and to seriously consider land acknowledgements.

I end this letter with many questions and feel inspired to be a part of the solution. What type of training do Richmond Hill City staff take part in regarding First Nations, Métis and Inuit histories, experiences and perspectives? How can we make Richmond Hill and Canada a safer place to identify as Indigenous? This year, 2019, is the United

Nations Year of Indigenous Languages – so what is Richmond Hill doing to honour this?  
Who has been part of this conversation so far and who has been left out?

We have a great opportunity to make a change in the right direction and to be on the right side of history in 2019.

Sincerely,  
Angie Ortlieb

### **Works Cited**

St. Denis, Verna. (2011). Silencing Aboriginal curricular content and perspectives through multiculturalism: "There are other children here". *The Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies*, 33, 306-317.

Battiste, M. (2013). *Decolonizing education: Nourishing the learning spirit*. Saskatoon: Purich Publishing Limited.