

## Indigenous History: East Ferris

I am submitting this letter in good faith because while I am not an expert on the following subjects and still have a lot to learn, I know enough to know we can do far better as a municipality. It is my intention to promote a conversation and corresponding actions that pursue an agenda of fairness and respect. Thank you in advance for your consideration of the following.

I have two related concerns to discuss. I'd like to first address the lack of historical Indigenous context in many of our recent conversations as well as, second, the cultural appropriation in the municipal calendar. In my view, we have a long way to go when it comes to celebrating our history in its entirety.

### **Lack of Indigenous historical context in ongoing Council matters**

On the first concern related to a lack of historical context in our recent conversations. We are engaging in some very important conversations and celebrations without a full historical picture, and while excluding Indigenous history from the narrative. When speaking about the Algonquin land claim, for example, hearing it be reduced to a planning concern instead a constitutionally-protected treaty process highlights some incredible gaps in our knowledge. When I hear things said such as 'that was a hundred years ago' or 'it's time to move on' or 'we'll fight', I am reminded that we are currently ill-equipped to partake in these important conversations.

### **Lack of Indigenous representation leading to incidence of cultural appropriation**

Second, when I received our municipal calendar, I was saddened to see a clear case of cultural appropriation celebrated in our publication. I am referring to an image on the February 2021 page with people dressed up on a float labelled 'Les Equimaux du Nord'.

Cultural appropriation means representing someone else's culture without consent. In my view, this was an act of cultural appropriation, and celebrating that photograph today is again an extension that act.. The problem with cultural appropriation is that it erases history and allows ongoing colonial interference to continue today. Specifically, when the Inuit, in this case, are tokenized and/or stereotyped, it locks that simplified representation into the minds of non-Indigenous Canadians and makes it easier for some to rationalize events such as residential schools and unfulfilled land treaty obligations as acceptable. They are not acceptable. These are unfair and unjust examples of colonization, which continue to disadvantage people today.

Instead of understanding peoples and Nations as diverse and complex, non-Indigenous Canadians develop shallow one-dimensional stereotypes, which influence the way they think about inequality today, from clean drinking water to land claims. This is all reinforced by a colonial state that still operates with racist legislation like the Indian Act that excludes Indigenous Peoples from full participation in Canada as self-governing Nations, which as I understand it, is a big part of the original intent of Treaties, to share in the spirit of non-interference and collaboration.

In short, cultural appropriation and historical erasure contribute to dehumanization and conflict. Economically, colonialism works by dehumanizing groups of people, paving the way to extract land and resources without consent. So, if we tell the history of settler-Indigenous relations in a one-sided way, we actively maintain the unequal power relationships that Indigenous Peoples experience in mainstream Canadian society today. Again, this is all reinforced by all levels of government, including municipal, that don't seek to dismantle these unequal power relationships.

Importantly, I don't think that's the intent of a hard-working group of committee members or council but lack of intent is not an excuse in 2021, especially after everyone witnessed a spring and summer of protests focused on exactly these issues, not to mention the Truth and Reconciliation Commission calls to action in 2015, and the Royal Commission of Aboriginal Peoples in 1996.

I'd like to suggest the following measures to address the above concerns as a first step towards our responsibility to become more knowledgeable on these subjects to ensure we are operating with a lens for fairness and justice:

- I'm requesting that we properly document the complete Indigenous contextual history and land in East Ferris prior to 1921. I'm requesting we hire a local historian to complete this task in order to publish and promote as part of our centennial celebration to the public. The university and Nipissing First Nation have many historians and historical geographers and knowledge keepers who are more than capable of being hired for this task.
- I'm requesting that we explore Indigenous cultural safety training as a council and staff. The college has an Indigenous Cultural Safety Training that can be catered to our region and needs.
- I'm requesting an ongoing commitment to continuing to understand Indigenous history as an addition to our strategic planning process. One-time training or publications will not be sufficient towards a commitment towards meaningful reconciliation.
- I'm requesting we open our meetings with an acknowledgement of Indigenous territory and lands. This can be drafted appropriately with the help of the research from the historian or historical geographer. While land acknowledgements have received some criticism in recent years for being performative, they can serve an important function as a sign of respect. I implore us to consider that they are the beginning, not the end of our work in pursuing a more balanced understanding of our shared history. Our decisions at each meeting are connected to that history and to the future. Thus, our decisions should be rooted in a balanced understanding.

Although I am not an expert in the subject, I am continuing to seek to understand. If there are additional recommendations or suggested actions to take, I hope that with the above starting points, we can begin the journey together as a municipality.

With sincerity,

Erika Lougheed

Here are some initial resources for your consideration:

Cultural appropriation of Indigenous peoples in Canada:

<https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/cultural-appropriation-of-indigenous-peoples-in-canada>

"We built a life from nothing" White settler colonialism and the myth of meritocracy:

<https://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/National%20Office/2017/12/McLean.pdf>

Algonquin Land Claim:

<https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1355436558998/1539789262384>

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada:

<https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1450124405592/1529106060525>

<https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1607963508385/1607963800960>

[http://www.trc.ca/assets/pdf/Calls\\_to\\_Action\\_English2.pdf](http://www.trc.ca/assets/pdf/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf)

[http://www.trc.ca/assets/pdf/Survivors\\_Speak\\_2015\\_05\\_30\\_web\\_o.pdf](http://www.trc.ca/assets/pdf/Survivors_Speak_2015_05_30_web_o.pdf)