



Williams Lake
FIRST NATION

October 29, 2021

Sent via e-mail: council@williamslake.ca

Mayor Walt Cobb and Council
City of Williams Lake
450 Mart Street
Williams Lake, BC
V2G 1N3

Dear Mayor and Council:

Re: An Open Letter Regarding Mayor Walt Cobb's Social Media Post About Residential Schools

I write in response to a posting on Mayor Cobb's social media this afternoon, where he shares a lengthy narrative about the "other side of the story" with respect to residential schools. The text of that post is attached. Without getting into exhaustive detail, the pith and substance is that this post is something shared by non-indigenous individual which refers to a letter allegedly written by a First Nations individual that says (and I'm admittedly paraphrasing) that "residential schools weren't so bad, and there were a lot of good things about them."

In June of 2020, at a duly convened meeting of Williams Lake City Council, there was a bizarre dialogue regarding residential schools that occurred in response to a discussion about the Williams Lake First Nation's cannabis cultivation project on WLFN IR#6. During that dialogue, Mayor Cobb and Councillor Brenner made comments to the effect that there are "always two sides of the story" with respect to residential schools and their impact on Indigenous people. If you need your memory refreshed, a summary of the meeting can be found at:

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/williams-lake-indian-band-city-councillor-resignation-residential-school-comment-1.5618540>

In May of 2021, Tk'emlups te Secwepemc First Nation ("TteS") discovered the unmarked remains of 215 children on the site of the former Kamloops Residential School. While the discovery came as no surprise to TTS, or to most other First Nations who have had to live with the legacy of Residential Schools, it was a rude awakening to Canada as a whole that there is an ugly part of our history that has been swept under the rug. Our Prime Minister stated that the TteS discovery was a "painful reminder of a shameful chapter of our Country's history."

Following the TteS discovery, the nation responded with a huge outpouring of support for First Nations, and there was a broad acknowledgment that there is much work to do to address the impacts of colonization and the damage that has been suffered by multiple generations of indigenous people. In the summer of 2021, we saw correspondence that indicated that the City of Williams Lake Council was attempting to better understand reconciliation and what role it could play in relation to reconciliation. While we never saw any meaningful evidence that the City of Williams Lake was taking proactive steps in relation to reconciliation with First Nations, we were somewhat encouraged to see that it was at least on your Council's radar.

In August of 2021, WLFN commenced the formal investigation of the site of the former St. Joseph's Mission Residential School ("SJM"). This exercise involves both a field component (using ground penetrating radar and other technologies), a research component (whereby we review archival records in relation to SJM), and an

interview component (whereby information is gathered directly from Residential School survivors). In the first few months of this investigation, we have heard numerous stories of rape, torture, and abuses of human rights. We have heard stories of children placed in dumpsters, disposed of in incinerators, and children who simply disappeared without explanation.

To date the various investigations of former residential school sites have revealed more than 7000 unmarked graves. On September 30, 2021, Canada celebrated the first National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. WLFN conducted a ceremony that day that was attended by approximately 700 people. We were touched and encouraged by the massive show of support from the population at large, and it gave us hope that there was a path forward for Canadians, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, to work toward the healing of our country. Tragically, on that very same day, we had a WLFN member who took his own life. This was a stark reminder of the problems our community faces and will likely continue to face for decades, if not generations, even with the best efforts of all Canadians.

Fast forward to today. We can no longer abide the City of Williams Lake, or any of its elected officials, trying to advance a narrative which is a slap in the face to our community, to other First Nations communities, or to the vast majority of Canadians who acknowledge the horror of residential schools and who want to assist with reconciliation.

Bluntly stated, there is no place for Mayor Cobb or his dogma in today's world. He may hide behind the fact that he is "merely sharing a post" – but his agenda is clear. Despite the TteS and other residential school discoveries, despite the countless well-documented first person accounts from residential school survivors, despite the numerous convictions of officials and personnel associated with residential schools, despite the condemnation of that "school" system by our Prime Minister and most other provincial governments, despite the admission or responsibility from the churches associated with the operation of the residential school system -- Mayor Cobb isn't convinced that the criticism of that residential school system is legitimate.

WLFN Council is asking for a formal response from the City of Williams Lake as to their position on Mayor Cobb's social media post. Further, we would like the City Council to formally clarify their position in relation to residential schools and the impact of those schools on First Nations people. I don't expect you to provide a detailed essay (as it's abundantly clear you have a great deal to learn). We would just like to know whether you, as an elected body, are of the collective mind that there are "two sides to every story" and whether you believe that, depending on who you talk to, "residential schools might be bad or they might be good."

I'm requesting that you provide a response to this correspondence by end of day on November 1st.

Sincerely,

WILLIAMS LAKE FIRST NATION

Per



Chief Willie Sellars