

12-5-2015

To: Victoria Mayor and Council, and members of the Governance and Priorities Committee

Re: *Motion to repatriate the Lekwungen sacred site in Beacon Hill Park*

I am writing in support of the motion to return the Checkers Pavilion site to the Esquimalt and Songhees First Nations. I strongly endorse the motion and supporting documentation. They are a significant step forward in reconciliation, and it is most fitting that our capital city be that example to the province of British Columbia.

I am a school administrator in the Greater Victoria School District, a founding member of the BC Principals and Vice Principals Association's Aboriginal Leadership Advisory Committee, and a proud member of the Metis community. The education system has a moral, and educational imperative to teach our students about the first peoples of Canada, and our shared history as Canadians. Along with our students, we endeavor to re-educate their families and community through the lens of truth and reconciliation.

The Lekwungen people continue to collaborate with our school district, graciously host our students and educators in their communities, and to share their teachings in our schools. We are in great need of expanding these educational opportunities to increase accessibility for our students, their families and the greater community. Beacon Hill Park is the jewel of our city, a place of significance to the Lekwungen people, and a historic meeting place for our Aboriginal and European ancestors. It is most fitting that it becomes the location of this common gathering place where the traditional stewards of the land will again act as official hosts to community members and visitors to our city. Its proximity to the Royal BC Museum would facilitate opportunities for a more comprehensive educational experience for participants. Educators are hungry for such opportunities for their students, and our endeavors will be greatly enhanced by access to a ceremonial Long House, a demonstration site, community art projects, and historical installations. ***Our schools need this House of Education.***

A significant number of Aboriginal Canadians reside in the Greater Victoria region. Many are far away from their traditional communities and lack a ceremonial place to gather, to connect with their indigeneity, and to participate in shared cultural and spiritual practices. This proposed project would provide opportunity for the Lekwungen people to host such gatherings and ceremonies for the greater Aboriginal community, should they so wish. This is a time-honoured traditional practice, and this proposal would go a long way to address healing and reconciliation. The greater Aboriginal community thirsts for such “non-denominational” opportunities to share and collectively participate in our common cultural practices and worldviews, and to work together to instill them in our children. You honour the Lekwungen people by supporting their capacity to reclaim this role, and you honour all Aboriginal people by allowing us the opportunity to be recipients of their hospitality. ***The Aboriginal Community needs this House of Celebration.***

Our nation is at a turning point, and more and more voices are endorsing the message: “*Idle No More*”. I ask you to allow Victoria to embrace this trail-breaking initiative, to be that catalyst for momentum, and to be an exemplary agent of change. Let Beacon Hill once again serve a historic role in the Canadian story. ***Canada needs this House of Reconciliation.***

I urge you to have the courage to pass this motion, to pioneer a new working relationship with the Lekwungen people and your other Aboriginal constituents, and to allow *all* the people of Greater Victoria to believe they are participants in forging a new future.

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