



OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
John Taylor

Mayor Taylor's Speech: Land Acknowledgement Plaque Unveiling Event

Boozhoo, Anin, Tansi, Hello and welcome

First of all welcome everyone who is joining us today via Facebook Live including our members of Council – Deputy Mayor Tom Vegh, Councillor Simon, Councillor Woodhouse, Councillor Twinney, Councillor Morrison, Councillor Kwapis, Councillor Broome, and Councillor Bisanz. I would also like to welcome the residents of Newmarket, the residents of Georgina Island and the residents of Peguis First Nation in Manitoba.

Today is an important day – a day I know I will remember long after I leave this office. It is an important day because this plaque is a concrete step forward in our Town's commitment to Diversity and Inclusivity and to understanding and acting upon the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Today we are permanently acknowledging that these lands are the traditional lands of the Wendat, Haudeeno-saunee and Anishinaabe people. This plaque by its very presence will acknowledge each and every day that this town hall of government is located on the treaty land of the Williams Treaties First Nations and other Indigenous peoples.

But a land acknowledgement is only words if we do not attach meaning and knowledge and action to those words. I would like to take moment to explain the meaning I attach to the words on this plaque. I want to share a couple of stories with you that give meaning to this land acknowledgement for me. About 5 years ago the Region was creating a new road – the Bathurst Extension- and while doing so they uncovered evidence of an Indigenous community. I immediately asked if I could visit the site and better understand what they had found and the history related to it. When I arrived on a beautiful fall day the earth had been scraped and one could see clearly the discolored earth where each pole of a longhouse had once entered the ground. The full outline of the longhouse was clear and the presence of this building became very real. I could also see the discolored earth where each of the five fire pits had been – one fire pit for each family living in this longhouse. There was also a clearly demarcated refuse area where pottery and arrowheads were found. It was then explained to me that this was the site of a longhouse of the Haudeeno-saunee people in the 13th century. Think about that – the 13th century – hundreds of years before the first white person arrived these people, these families were living here on this land. So when we hear a land acknowledgement – when I hear a land acknowledgement – it is not just a statement that indigenous people may have been here at some point long ago.....what it means for me is that in the case of Newmarket - Indigenous people lived here as families and as a community. They lived day in and day out - hunting, playing, and raising their children right here on this land. This was and is their land in ways it can never be ours and we must acknowledge that.

There is a second story I would like to share with you that brings meaning to this land acknowledgement for me also. As many of you know I taught for four years at the Peguis First Nation School in Manitoba over 30 years ago. The experience of living in that community has changed the way I view the world to this day. I was able to get to know the vibrant, caring, respectful culture that the people of Peguis shared but I also saw the ongoing example of racism they had to live with almost daily in their lives and the effects of colonization, residential schools and underfunded education and social services. I took my students to sporting events often and on more than one occasion I saw my young students encounter hateful racist comments hurled at them. They were more than once told to get out of here – out of this place. Think about what a land acknowledgement is and then think about the absurdity of non-Indigenous people telling these indigenous kids to get out of here – off those lands – off their lands. While living at Peguis I came to understand the full history of Colonization and residential schooling and their relationship to the land. I want to thank the people of Peguis some of whom I am friends with to this day for welcoming me and teaching me so much and for helping me see the world in a different and better way. I mean that sincerely.

So, I share these two stories with you because for me Truth and Reconciliation and this Land Acknowledgment are both about recognizing the deep history and ties to the land that our Indigenous residents and neighbours have but it is also about acknowledging that we have not honoured that history and we have a dark history ourselves in this country that tried to break the bond of Indigenous people with their land. For me a land acknowledgement inherently recognizes all of these facts.

I will be proud to enter this building each day knowing that we as a Town are acknowledging that these are the traditional lands of the Wendat, Haudeno-saunee and Anshianbee people and knowing that we will work with our closest neighbours the Chippewa's of Georgina Island to create a stronger, more respectful relationship and to work together to create a better tomorrow.

I want to close by thanking Chief Big Canoe, Councillor Hoeg and Hayley Williamson for being here today, for providing us with guidance on the creation of the plaque, for the drumming and the smudging and for their friendship as we move forward. I also wanted to thank Carol Cologna who is an Indigenous member of our community here in Newmarket and person who has offered me guidance over the years on how we can be a more inclusive community. I am placing a pouch of tobacco on the table for each of you to show my thanks and appreciation.

I would now like to read the text of the Land Acknowledgement that we just unveiled and that will be read at every Council meeting in the future:

We acknowledge that the Town of Newmarket is located on the traditional territories of the Wendat, Haudeno-saunee, and the Anishinaabe peoples and the treaty land of the Williams Treaties First Nations and other Indigenous peoples whose presence here continues to this day. We thank them for sharing this land with us.

We also acknowledge the Chippewas of Georgina Island First Nation as our close neighbours and friends, and we work to ensure a cooperative and respectful relationship. I want to close by saying that in these times of upheaval and tension and anti-black racism that it is my hope that this land acknowledgement also serves to send a broader message to everyone that this is a town that is committed to the hard work of building a more inclusive, respectful, and equitable community and we welcome the relationships we will build on our journey to a better tomorrow.

Thank you, Miigwetch and have a great day.