

Regina, March 29, 2021

Dear Mayor Masters and members of City Council

I am writing in support of the recommendations from the Executive Committee as part of the Legacy Review for the John A. Macdonald statue. The “Issue” and “Discussion” sections of the Recommendation from City Planning and Community Development are absolutely essential to frame the meaning of the recommendations and to indicate a way forward. Based on what I have heard myself, and on practices in other jurisdictions, I believe that placing the statue in storage while the process continues is absolutely necessary.

As a citizen and as a scholar specializing around issues of coexistence, and notably around reconciliation, I did want to add a few comments concerning the way forward.

The current recommendation from the Executive committee places accountability with City Council for the next steps. In this way, City Councillors can act on behalf of the City of Regina as a whole in making its decisions, rather than have administrators be responsible for what should indeed be a public response.

However I am deeply concerned with the wording around consultation. Indeed consultation is the very lowest bar for participation of Indigenous people in the processes that affect them. Too often their voices are heard and then ignored; their perspectives are not understood, and are not carefully taken into consideration. There is a need for meaningful collaboration here.

I would thus encourage City Council to make its intentions clear by amending the motion, or as soon as possible, making an additional motion or a declaration, as it deems suitable, to address how participation and collaboration may take place. We must be clear on what meaning will be given to consultation and engagement. And we must be clear on what City Council will then do with the results of the engagement process.

I would also encourage City Council to take on a gradual approach, where a future location and appropriate educational possibilities are discussed in the spirit of commemorating residential schools and more widely the policies that have and continue to target Indigenous peoples, but only as a first step.

A second step would include discussion around a monument or public installation or display commemorating the survivors of residential schools and other colonial policies. This is also discussed in the policy review.

A third step would be to look at the other manifestations of colonialism in Regina, including the renaming of Dewdney avenue for instance.

And fourth, alongside all these steps, a review of current policies over which the City has control and which disproportionately affect Indigenous people must take place. After all, changing symbols and planning public space matters greatly, but is not sufficient by itself for reconciliation efforts to be meaningful.

What is more, we can see the legacy review process, if it is led in a good way with meaningful participation and collaboration of the appropriate members of Indigenous communities as a way to learn how to change the deeper aspects of colonial relationships and reduce the harm of discrimination and anti-Indigenous racism. The first three steps I highlight above can thus help us better transform our relationships. And this approach ought to be taking the best out of Indigenous and non-Indigenous ways of gathering and making decisions collectively.

Sincerely,

Jérôme Melançon

Associate professor, French and Francophone intercultural studies & Philosophy

University of Regina