

A Castle and What it Represents - A New Ending Just In Time?

As citizens and leaders undertake learning and transformed action to respectfully address the 2015 Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) Calls to Action, we build new stories of what is possible for our collective future. Castlegar's name and flag shares the dominating image of a European castle, even though many of its citizens question and think beyond colonial legacies. In the scope of thousands of years of Indigenous stewardship, Castlegar itself is incredibly recent. We have an opportunity now to learn and grow empowered by the long and truthful history of these lands.

In this light, we question the wisdom of the current City of Castlegar plan to install a castle-themed play park, dominating the landscape as "Canada's Tallest Play Structure," for a longevity that is projected to be only 15 years. This development is targeted for an area of Millennium Park remarkable for its irreplaceable biodiversity, and most notable for its historic and cultural value as an established camas meadow. Camas is a sacred root food, cultivated and cared for through lineages of women's cultural practice and traditional ecological knowledge forming substantial part of healthy traditional diets for many coastal and interior Indigenous peoples.

That camas must be respected here and everywhere it grows is not only due to the TRC Calls to Action, but also a consequence of Section 35 of the 1982 Constitution Act, protecting Aboriginal rights. The recent Supreme Court of Canada decision affirming the Sn̓̓ayckstx (Sinixt Arrow Lakes) as an Aboriginal people of Canada, and situating Castlegar within their territory, means that there is a current and urgent responsibility to attend to this relationship in committed ways.

A recently formed camas advocacy group "Love to the Roots" is alert to the decision-making that will unfold in the coming months relative to the play park aspect of the Official Community Plan (OCP) currently being reviewed. Although council appeared to be receptive to alternative perspectives presented by Megan Read and Eileen Senyk with the support of our group at a public meeting in June, it will be in the actions taken that decision-makers can show themselves to be leaders in both caring for the land, and in following through with the responsibility to build right relations with First Nations people.

We will call attention to rushed or secretive processes, and we will question simplistic ideas like that which has previously been shared, in which relocating camas to a conservation area, akin to a reserve, was seen as a viable solution rather than protecting the ecosystem where it already thrives. Although these may be common strategies, they perpetuate colonial practices, as deplorable as the domination represented by the castle, and we want more for our communities and for the future.

Since the play structure is intended for the enjoyment and celebration of the local children, their perspectives must also inform this decision. Children, youth and teachers have been grappling with the truth of Canada's history with courage and vision for years through the Calls to Action from the TRC. This puts us at an interesting juncture where adult decision-makers are at a significant deficit in knowledge and awareness compared to their

constituents who are recently, or not yet, at voting age. Thousands of students from Castlegar, and neighboring school districts have learned about camas; they honour the beauty and sustenance it provides, the interconnections with pollinators and other plants and animals, and they care about its cultural significance. Children and youth are naturally tuned to ethical engagement. If they witness the irreversible destruction of camas and its habitat, within the supposed intention to promote their enjoyment of Millennium Park, they will question and they will grieve.

Children and youth also resonate with actions of repair. Thankfully there is still time to live out a different ending. Could the story that begins with a Castle and plants relocated to a reserve acquire a new ending that would instead offer a life lesson to others? "We were headed along a misguided path, then we listened and changed course..." would be a story to model humility and growth. As a local educator and youth mentor, I work hard to build community in which adults show ourselves to be capable of self-examination, ethical reflection and transformation. Each one of us can do the same in our spheres of responsibility. In a community that uses the tag line "Happily ever after..." let us instead give the children reasons to celebrate for the long term, and places to play that do not destroy what remains of thousands of years of Indigenous ecology.