

LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ARE NOT ENOUGH

WITHOUT ADDITIONAL ACTION THEY'RE JUST A DECLARATION OF SQUATTERS' RIGHTS, WRITES SHANE PENNELLS



SHANE PENNELLS
Column

If you've been to a public event over the past several years you will have probably heard a "land acknowledgment" read aloud, going over what traditional Indigenous lands the event is taking place on and the

treaties involved in modern land usage.

While these statements have become customary as part of reconciliation efforts, there is a growing disenchantment with them within the Indigenous community itself, with the acknowledgment being compared to a declaration of squatters' rights.

An analogy: You invite me into your living room and I decide to make myself at home on your couch. Soon I'm rearranging the pillows, settling in and refusing to leave, despite your protestations.

After weeks of getting crumbs everywhere and forever losing the remote in the depths of the cushions, I then declare that I acknowledge that this is your couch, that it is a very nice and comfy one and that you were so kind to invite me in. Despite this, I make no ef-

fort to leave or even slightly clean up after myself.

So, despite my acknowledgement, what benefit are you truly getting from your couch? This imperfect metaphor sums up the core frustration with land acknowledgement. Yes, they say that an event is on traditional Indigenous lands, but so what? There's no plan to return the land, there's nothing in the works to give the Indigenous community any real benefit from the event's proceedings, such as a part of any ongoing revenue.

Some of you may point out that some acknowledgement mention treaties that allowed for non-Indigenous use of the land, and you'd be partially correct. This is where things get problematically fuzzy. While many treaties between Indigenous peoples and British and Canadian

governments have been entered into, there is increased legal scrutiny on whether disputed lands were properly surrendered and if all terms have been properly upheld since.

For example, the 1492 Land Back Lane protests that have been occurring in Caledonia cite the Haldimand Proclamation of 1874, declaring that 10 kilometres on either side of the Grand River, from its source to Lake Erie, be given to the Haudenosaunee people for allying with the British during the American Revolution. Today, this would include almost all of Caledonia, Brantford, Cambridge and Kitchener. This is only one of dozens of land and treaty claims currently before Canadian courts.

When I'm asked how I would change the use of land acknowledgement, my answer is simple: for any

event that proclaims one, have some of the proceeds or opportunities created by that event go to a local Indigenous centre or program. Without some sort of reconciliatory act toward the First Nations mentioned by a specific acknowledgement, that proclamation is nothing more than empty, performative noise.

I believe that land acknowledgement, followed up by outreaches to the Indigenous communities they seek to honour, could be a powerful tool toward reconciliation and an integral part of the long conversation toward healing the mistreatment inflicted upon Canada's First Nations Peoples.

Shane Pennells is an Indigenous filmmaker and writer who works with at-risk youth.

CITY NEEDS A REBOOT

While the municipal election is not until October 24, the candidate list is narrowing for key positions for our city and region.

Hamilton the once Ambitious City, is in need of a major reboot and some significant polish to its image.

The upcoming municipal election needs a strong voter turnout by all eligible voters in our region.

This is needed to bring in new ideas, people and programs to help restore Hamilton to a vibrant, safe and affordable community that all citizens of our region want and deserve.

Please vote in the municipal election as your vote will be key in determining the future of Hamilton and our municipality.

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