



Loreena McKennitt - Rally #5 Remarks
December 21, 2020
Market Square, Stratford, Ontario

Good day everyone. My name is Loreena McKennitt and I'm speaking as the founder of the [Wise Communities](#) organization which is responsible for mounting this rally.

Thank you again for braving the elements to join us on this day of the winter solstice. Hopefully, it will be more than just the seasons which will experience the growing light.

Land Acknowledgement

I would also like to strengthen our rally openings by making a First Nations Land Acknowledgement.

It's a great privilege to share this beautiful territory, which has been the site of human activity – for many thousands of years.

This territory is governed by two treaties. The first is the *Dish With One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant* of 1701, made between the Anishinaabe and the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, an agreement to set violence aside and peacefully share and care for the land in the Great Lakes Basin.

<https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/a-dish-with-one-spoon>

The second is the *Huron Tract Treaty* of 1827, an agreement made by 18 Anishinaabek Chiefs and the Canada Company, an agency of the British Crown. As individuals, we are in a process of learning how we can be better treaty partners.

We wish to honour the ancestral guardians of this land and its waterways: the Anishinaabe, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, the Wendat, and the Neutrals. Today, many Indigenous peoples continue to call this land home and act as its stewards, and this responsibility extends to all peoples, to share and care for this land for generations to come.

I would also like to acknowledge some of our youth who have joined us again today. We're delighted to see you here and to have you participate in this rally.

I'd also like to thank the folks at [Get Concerned Stratford](#) for all their hard work and I know they have some important updates to share.

I would also like to invite anyone here who has yet to join our [Wise Communities](#) mailing list to please do so, so that we can stay in touch for future purposes. My remarks today will be posted on our website shortly after this rally should you want to refer back to them.

And finally, I would like to acknowledge the passing of Jack Van Nes whose property we have been discussing as the site for the proposed glass plant and to whose family we would like to extend our deepest sympathies.

To get things started, I'd like to invite Melissa Verspeeten to give us an update from *Get Concerned Stratford*. Melissa?

(Melissa speaks.)

Thank you for that Melissa. Always helpful to hear what developments you have folks have to share.

Summary overview

Well, it's hard to believe we've gathered here every Monday for five weeks now. I have to commend everyone for staying with this, especially at this time of the year during a pandemic and so close to Christmas.

Our ability to express not only our concerns and passion, but display our stamina, is central to this whole exercise. I can't tell you how important this is to have a strong showing each Monday. It shows both city council and the media, which has increasing interest, that we are simply not going away until this matter is resolved.

We might take a short two-week break over the holidays, but I will say now that if there is no movement on council's part before the Christmas break in a few days, we'll be right back here on Monday January 4th. We will, of course, abide by whatever COVID restrictions might be in play. So, mark your calendars.

Summary of Concerns

Over these past four weeks or so, in rallies and in meetings, we've heard from many, many concerned citizens and organizations deeply troubled by the lack of transparency and the absence of a democratic process, in addition to the myriad concerns inherent in the factory itself.

For those who are new to this rally experience, I want to take a moment to outline a brief summary of those concerns.

The concerns and grievances boil down to the following:

1. A deeply-flawed consultation process which no one could consider democratic or fair, either for citizens of this city, or our friends in the First Nations communities
2. A collection of serious environmental issues which involve greenhouse gas emissions and massive water consumption
3. Poor use of good, arable farmland and its relation to future food security
4. Jobs for which we are already facing a shortage of people, a concern for workplace conditions, and the issue of a proposed onsite living quarters

5. And finally, our local and national security, which I will speak to a bit more a little later on.

You will now see a growing body of information and opinions on both the *Get Concerned Stratford* and [Wise Communities](#) websites, and we invite you to review what is on offer there.

And as we emphasized last week:

“We are not anti-industry. We know that a healthy and viable city depends on a spectrum of businesses and industries which provide employment and financial well-being. However, what we are saying is these industries and businesses need to be complementary and aligned with a vision for the future, particularly one with climate change in mind, and which is informed by the highest values and standards we know. For many, the image of this massive and potentially environmentally flawed plant, does not rest well with a city renowned for its tourism and agricultural industries.”

So, when I reflected on the voices we had yet to hear from concerning this glass factory, it was youth, agriculture and First Nations which came to mind. To this end, I am delighted to say that we will have *all* those voices represented here today.

Youth

Let me begin with the voice of our youth. As they observe us getting out into the streets and making our concerns and displeasure known, they can see and learn that this is a necessary step sometimes, even though it may not always be comfortable or convenient.

It is *their* future we are fighting for, as well as what remains of ours. We are handing them a planet full of challenges and it is essential that we work together to repair and improve things as much as we can and as quickly as possible.

With this, I would like to invite Quintin Whittaker to share a few words with us. Quintin is 12 years old and a student at Stratford Central Intermediate School. Quintin?

(Quintin speaks)

Thank you so much Quintin for those fine words. Once again, I can't tell you how grateful we are that you were able to join us here today. Hearing your voice means so much to us.

Agriculture

I moved to Stratford from Morden, Manitoba 40 years ago and have lived more of my life here than there. In a way, both communities have a lot in common, although Stratford is 10 times larger. In particular, both communities have a strong agricultural component.

I grew up in a third-generation family of cattle dealers and spent much of my time on the family farm, learning about gardening, the richness of the woodlot and animal husbandry, including tending to livestock in minus-30-degree weather. I came to appreciate the richness of farming life, even though it was hard work. I also came to appreciate the bounty of promise which lay in the soil itself, particularly if it was cared for in a regenerative and respectful way.

And yet, in a country like Canada where there *appears* to be a boundless amount of land itself, perhaps we have become complacent. Perhaps we haven't had the same kind of appreciation for the land as the Van Nes family, who lived through the war in the Netherlands.

Complacency can lead us to make some poor choices as to what we do with land and how to protect it. Nonetheless, as my father and grandfather would say, they aren't making it anymore so we'd better protect it for our children, grandchildren and future generations.

Which brings me to our next theme, that of agriculture and the detrimental role MZOs have played with respect to the farming community, not just locally, but across the province.

For those of you who don't know what an MZO is by now, they are highly-powerful administrative instruments which require *no public consultation* and *cannot be appealed* except at the pleasure of the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing who issues them.

More MZOs have been issued in this past year than during the previous 20 years combined. They are highly undemocratic in nature and have been used to by-pass, interfere with, or override many governing bodies designed to protect the environment, including highly-sensitive wetlands.

These would include conservation authorities and the Greenbelt Council. David Crombie, former chairman of the council, former Toronto mayor and former Conservative federal cabinet minister, [spoke of this during our rally last week](#). He had recently resigned from the Greenbelt Council in protest.

The Perth Federation of Agriculture has also made their concerns and position known with regards to the annexation of farmland for the proposed glass plant.

For those who are unaware of the size and prominence of this organization, it represents 1,700 farms in this area alone. And with that I would like to invite Ms. Sara Wood, vice-president of the organization, to share their concerns with us. Sara?

(Remarks by Sara Wood)

Thank you for sharing those words with us Sara and it is so important for us to hear them. Folks living in the city don't hear enough about the challenges and concerns of our agricultural community and how we all have a vested interest in moving together. It is so important that we hear what your members are saying and feeling. I hope we will all remember this moment when the next election comes around. As we conclude this section of our rally on agriculture, I would like to read for you some of the [letter of concern](#) from the Ontario Federation of Agriculture of August 10th this year.

"We fully recognize the need for ministerial authority to issue municipal zoning orders (MZOs) for municipalities without municipal organization and therefore without official plans and zoning by-laws. For these municipalities, MZOs serve the purpose in facilitating orderly growth and development.....a use of municipal zoning orders we support.

However, the OFA expresses its deep-seated concerns with the recent proliferation of Municipal Zoning Orders (MZOs) issued for municipalities with robust planning systems, Official Plans and zoning by-laws.

We are seeing MZOs issued for municipalities with robust planning systems at a frequency never before seen. This frequent use undermines Ontario's long-established system of land use planning, under the Planning Act, Provincial Policy Statement (PPS) and Municipal Official Plans and Zoning By-laws"

So, as Mr. Crombie so aptly put it last week, we here in Stratford are definitely not alone. We've got lots of company now, in terms of those harmed by these MZOs, including the various federations of agriculture.

First Nations

In the process of homeschooling my son this year, I set out some particular goals. We wanted to embrace civics, as well as Indigenous studies. Part of the selfish act of homeschooling was to compensate for my own lack of education in these areas. So, we learned together and are learning still.

In the past couple of years, our studies took us from the Roman Empire up through the age of the monarchs, the age of exploration and the so called 'Age of Discovery', the history of the slave trade up to Black Lives Matter, and quite disturbingly, the colonization of North America and its Indigenous people. It has been a sobering journey.

Here in Canada, most, if not all, are aware of the history of residential schools and the missing and murdered Indigenous women. Perhaps less well known is the outright slaughter of the Inuit sled dogs as the machine of assimilation rolled on. We know that the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples was adopted on September 13, 2007.

And in very recent years there has evolved the constitutional step of a Duty to Consult. Mr. Bryn Gray in his May 30, 2016 report to the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, captures it this way:

"More than a decade ago, the Supreme Court of Canada recognized the Crown's constitutional duty to consult. It requires the federal, provincial, and territorial governments to consult and, where appropriate, accommodate Aboriginal communities

whenever they contemplate decisions that may adversely impact asserted or established Aboriginal or treaty rights.

The comments that I received in this engagement were largely critical of Canada's approach. Aboriginal groups overwhelmingly felt that the federal government, with the exception of Parks Canada, often does not engage in meaningful consultation. Many viewed Canada's approach as largely a one-size-fits-all, box-ticking exercise that fails to meaningfully address their concerns and relies too heavily on industry proponents and regulatory processes.

“There is no single recipe for meaningful consultation. However, the successful approaches of some industry proponents and government entities have certain common ingredients, such as bringing the right attitude and outlook to the table, a focus on building relationships and trust, and engaging as early as possible in the decision-making process.

To set the foundation for meaningful consultation, Canada should ensure that the overarching focus of any new guidance for federal officials and industry is on how to build or improve relationships with Aboriginal groups and how to use the duty to consult as a key tool and framework to support these efforts. There should also be a greater emphasis on engaging Aboriginal groups as early as possible before key components of a project or a proposal are finalized and become difficult to change.”

You can find a link to [Mr. Gray's report](#) on our [Wise Communities](#) website.

So, here we are in Stratford, Ontario, Canada on the threshold of the year 2021. I wonder how we're doing in that Duty to Consult, in relation to this massive factory. Have we met the bare minimum, or less, or have we met the highest standard? I fear it may be the former.

Now, I will admit I was unfamiliar of this constitutional duty to consult, but once I learned of it I reached out to the five communities in our extended watershed, which could possibly be affected by this factory

Today, I am delighted to say that I was able to invite Ms. Leslee White-Eye to speak to us.

Leslee is the former chief of the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation and the nation's first woman elected as chief. In that role Leslee brought local, regional and

national attention to the environment, the importance of water and how these important issues go hand-in-hand with First Nation treaty and Aboriginal rights and title.

Prior to being chief she was an education officer for the Ontario Ministry of Education where she was responsible for writing the revised Native Studies curriculum and leading provincial feedback for the native language curriculum. She was recently awarded an honorary doctorate of Laws from Western University and earned her Political Science and Master of Education degrees at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver. She currently sits as a board member of Kings' University College in London, Ontario.

May I introduce to you, Ms. Leslee White-Eye.

(Ms. White-Eye speaks)

Thank you Leslee. I can't tell you how grateful we are you were able to find the time in your very busy schedule to speak to us today. I know we've all benefited greatly from your words and I do look forward to hearing you again. It has been an honour and a privilege to have you join us today.

Thank you. Miigwech.

National security

Now, I want to return one more time to the matter of national security and how it applies particularly to us here in Stratford.

Almost every day now, we're learning about ever-increasing, state-sponsored hacking and other national security concerns. We're reminded that Stratford is a wireless, Smart City, and a centre for research and development related to autonomous vehicles. It is suggested that this open network could be used for surveillance of Chinese nationals, or other people living in Stratford.

In order to give you a taste of what we could be facing in our future if we, as Canadians, forfeit so much of our infrastructure, resources and influence to a foreign power such as China, I will quote from Ron Deibert, who heads the

Citizen's Lab at the University of Toronto. In his recently published book [RESET](#), he writes the following about the Chinese territory of Xinjian in northwest China (page 165).

“Authorities require locals to install QR bar codes on the doors of their homes; these contain details on the residents and are routinely scanned by local authorities and cross-checked against centralised data bases. According to Human Rights Watch, Xinjiang authorities have started systematically collecting biometric data, “including DNA samples, fingerprints, iris scans and blood types of all residents between the age of 12 and 65.”

I believe Canada and its citizens must quickly emerge from this blanket of complacency, naivety, and good manners. We need to understand what is going on and be prepared to protect our sovereignty, community by community.

Climate change

As I head towards the end of our presentation here today, I want to draw your attention once again to the subject of climate change. We were grateful to have Anne Colbert from *Climate Momentum* speak to us a couple of weeks ago. In preparation for today's rally, I asked her to give me a few more remarks that I might share on her behalf. So here they are:

The greenhouse gas emission estimates for the proposed Xinyi plant are alarming. This is completely at odds with the emissions reduction targets and community climate actions we are planning right now – a draft climate action plan will be finalized soon and is expected for city council discussion early in the new year.

The public consultation process for this plan is open for just two more days. As citizens, we must not miss the opportunity to call for a strong climate plan that ensures we all do our part – the city, business and industry, individuals and families, and the community as a whole.

Please have your say in the public consultation before it closes Wednesday [Dec. 23, 2020]. If many people participate, the Perth County Climate Change Coordinator will be more convincing in telling Stratford City Council that residents care about climate action and want an effective local climate plan.

There are also comment fields in the survey where you can state your concern about greenhouse gas emissions from new factories, the annexation of farmland for industry, and fast-tracking land use decisions without public consultation. Our participation in local climate action can help us achieve the kind of growth we want to see in Stratford.”

We must recognize that inherent in this glass plant proposal are some serious components working against Stratford’s climate change goals. Please undertake that [survey](#) before Wednesday. Anne and her team urgently need all our support.

Final summary

So, I’ve reflected on why this particular issue of the glass plant has struck people so hard. No doubt there’s a lot to it, but many people in this community are still smarting from previous projects which received a similarly rushed and less transparent process. They include the development of the new Tom Patterson Theatre and the renewable natural gas plant. These are two initiatives which some argue should have deserved a response similar to this one.

People are understandably upset when transparency and inclusion is road blocked by an arsenal of in-camera meetings, non-disclosure agreements, omnibus bills, conflicts-of-interest, and a consultation process so late in the day that no one can call it fair, equitable or democratic.

Clearly, coming out of this whole misadventure will have to be the construction of a completely different formula for public involvement and I’m happy to announce today that that discussion has now begun in earnest.

And so, here we are – in our age of reckoning. Our societies and our planet are at a crossroads.

This horrific era of colonization of everything must end since it has brought us to the face of our own extinction, be it the land, people, or remaining species. There is no more land to colonize and then industrialize without facing the direst of consequences. This glass plant is one more brick in that road.

Nature, our forests and the land have had no voice in the face of these centuries of overwhelming colonizing forces. Species are going extinct. Polar bears are wandering into human communities looking for food, or becoming lost in the oceans as the ice disappears from their natural habitat. The caribou are undertaking new and perilous migrations in their search for food. We know that even the virus, which has come to traumatize this planet, is likely to have come from another species from which we should be more physically removed.

And yet, we know that every piece of land on this planet consists of ecosystems, far beyond the human eye and sadly, it seems, beyond our comprehension. Yet, we are all dependent on them, be they such pollinators as bees and butterflies. Or the trees which provide us with the oxygen we breath and sequester the carbon we are trying to reduce in the face of climate change.

We must now be prepared to approach the future with a new paradigm of thinking. One where we are not in dominion over everything, but where we respect *all* living things and find our rightful place *within* the natural world. We must remind ourselves that we're only custodians of this land which our creator has so generously given us and which will pass on to others when we are no longer here. We need to be making good choices.

As one looks out over the arch of time, we can see most significantly during the age of exploration and so-called 'discovery,' followed by the Industrial Revolution during which *technical* progress became unhinged from *moral* progress, that we have put ourselves on a path of self-destruction.

We know in our hearts what's at stake here is much more than a glass plant, jobs or tax revenue. What is at stake is the health of our planet, the land which gives us sustenance, the environment and the species struggling to find food and habitat, and the future of our youth who will inherit the challenges we've left them.

We also know our democracies are rotting from the inside out, as well as from the outside in, and that we as citizens need to – and must – get more involved as we're doing now. Simply voting people in once every four years and stepping away, as one councillor put it to me, is simply not an option.

Our communities and our democracies are too vulnerable to being scammed and gamed by vested interests. This includes the misuse of such instruments as

Ministerial Zoning Orders, or rushed propaganda sessions where not even the questions and answers at the end are kept for review, as was the case with the recording of Xinyi's information session a few weeks back. These all contribute to a culture where there can be no trust. And where there is no trust, there is no hope. We must not let that happen.

Rather, now is the time to mobilize our communities and show others what real democracy, environmental stewardship and human rights look like.

So thank you all for coming out again today. Please stay connected to the *Get Concerned* and [Wise Communities](#) websites and their mailing lists for the next chapter of this civic emergency. If they think they have heard our voices so far, they won't recognize what they sound like in the New Year.

At this time of the winter solstice as the days turn to light, may our deep connectedness with life on this planet, its sacredness and all which gives us life continue to grow.

And as citizens of this community and all across this land we continue to value democracy, human rights and the rule of law. And defending it begins at home.

Thank you.