



FINAL REPORT:

Results, Considerations & Recommendations from the Prime Ministers
Path Public Engagement Process

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In Winter 2021, First Peoples Group was asked to design and conduct an engagement process to receive input from Township of Wilmot residents about the Prime Ministers Path project. Over a 6-week period in Spring 2021, we heard from more than 475 residents through several engagement activities. In analyzing all the comments and conversations we received, three major themes emerged:

1. A discussion on the educational value of the Prime Ministers Path project;
2. How community cohesion has been affected by the Prime Ministers Path project; and
3. Lack of effective community engagement/consultation in Wilmot and opportunities to improve these processes in the future.

The purpose of this report is to provide the Wilmot Township Council with a detailed account of the public engagement process on the Prime Ministers Path conducted by First Peoples Group including an overview of the engagement process and our findings.

Our team at First Peoples Group is confident that we have heard sufficient evidence from all sides of the issue to move forward with the drafting of this report, which offers the Council of Wilmot Township with three considerations.

Based on what we have heard and our experience working with communities and municipalities on similar issues, First Peoples Group advises the Township of Wilmot Council to consider:

1. Immediately removing existing statues related to the Prime Ministers Path and to discontinue any future expansion or investment in the Prime Ministers Path as it exists today.
2. Creating a working group comprised of a balanced representation of the individuals and communities within Wilmot Township to discuss, develop and suggest plans for the implementation of next steps centred in community cohesion and healing.
3. Committing to transforming community engagement and consultation processes in Wilmot Township in a way that encourages greater openness, accountability and citizen participation in decision making.

We recognize that this has been a difficult process for all involved and we call upon the residents of Wilmot to approach this process and next steps with kindness, grace and humility.

We know that consensus on a project this polarizing is simply not possible. But what we have heard has led us to propose these three considerations on how to move forward in a good way.

We therefore humbly submit our report as follows.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

On July 27, 2020, the Council for the Township of Wilmot passed a resolution (appendix A) recognizing that the unbalanced historical representation within the Prime Ministers Path project currently located on Wilmot Township property, which is also the traditional Indigenous territory of the Neutral, Anishnaabeg, Haudenosaunee and Mississauga peoples, perpetuates sentiments of oppression and marginalization for some residents of Wilmot Township, as well as individuals who may visit the area. It was resolved that the statue of Canada's first prime minister be removed from the public property while a transparent public consultation process is implemented with a goal of compiling a findings report with recommendations and considerations to be presented to Council for further action on the future of the entire Prime Ministers Path project in the Township of Wilmot.

First Peoples Group (FPG) was contracted to design and implement this public engagement process.

The public engagement process officially launched with a meeting between FPG and the Prime Ministers Path Consultation Working Group (PMPCWG) on April 15, 2021 and will formally conclude on July 5th, 2021 when this report will be presented in full to the Council of Wilmot Township at a Special Council Meeting for their final decision on the issue.

This report presents the final results, considerations and recommendations from the public engagement process in Wilmot Township regarding the future of the Prime Ministers Path Project.

1.1 BACKGROUND

ABOUT THE PRIME MINISTERS PATH PROJECT

The concept of the Prime Minister Statues Project was initiated by residents of Waterloo Region with a vision to create statues of each Prime Minister of Canada as part of Canada's celebration of the 150th anniversary of Confederation. Createscape Waterloo Region, a registered charity with objectives to promote arts and culture and the creative sector in Waterloo Region for purposes of public benefit, adopted the Prime Minister Statues Project as a charitable activity within its objectives.

In 2014, the Prime Ministers Statue project was proposed to Kitchener City Council. Prior to accepting the proposal Kitchener City Council invited residents to respond to an online survey to indicate their support for the project that proposed to erect 22 bronze statues of Former Canadian Prime Ministers in Victoria Park. Of the 2441 respondents, 1,920 (79%) expressed opposition to the statue proposal.

The Prime Ministers Statue Project was then proposed to, and accepted by, the Laurier Board of Governors in 2015. Following the acceptance of the project, concerns were raised which

included, but were not limited to, the lack of consultation in relation to the educational components of the project, the narrow historical scope and focus on prime ministers, and the potential for visual representation of certain historical narratives to conflict with goals of inclusiveness for Indigenous and marginalized students. In November, 2015, the President of Laurier University established a Special Advisory Committee tasked with creating opportunities for all interested community members to provide their insights into the impact(s) of the project on Laurier and the broader community. The consensus reached by the Special Advisory Committee, following an extensive community consultation process, was that the Prime Minister Statues Project in its entirety should not proceed. Their reason for the recommendation stated:

“As conceived, this project is unlikely to successfully provide opportunities for the intellectual inquiry and critical reflection necessary to understand the full context of the individuals, the complexities of their historical significance, and how this specific narrative of Canadian history interacts with a contemporary, diverse and inclusive understanding of Canada.”

- *Special Advisory Committee to the President Final Report on the Prime Minister Statues Project, 2016*

On May 5, 2016, Createscape Waterloo Region transferred the statues, associated research, intellectual property and other assets to the Corporation of the Township of Wilmot as the sole recipient, via a contract that was approved unanimously by the Mayor and Council of that time. Currently, the Township of Wilmot is in possession of statues that represent nine former Prime Ministers. Four of the nine statues are on public display on the path, four others have been received into storage and have not yet been installed, and the Sir John A. Macdonald statue has been removed to storage as per the July 2020 Council resolution.

SETTING THE CONTEXT REGARDING HISTORY AND COMMEMORATION

Canadians value their history and recognize that it is important to know about the country's past. Historical understanding creates engaged citizens, promotes critical thinking, encourages civic responsibility and produces a more inclusive society. History can be a bridge to connect personal stories to larger narratives and can give places, peoples and individuals a sense of identity. Historical understanding can help us make sense of contemporary issues, in the context of a changing world, and generate insight on differing perspectives. However, history can also be divisive and exclusionary. Much of Canada's history does not address nor confront Canada's colonial legacy.

The legacies of historical events, places, and individuals are complicated. History in general is complex, especially in times like now when the context for engaging with history is evolving and transforming. The way we tell stories, absorb information and interpret history has never been and will never be static. There is a growing desire to understand the history of Canada in ways that are more complex than what might have been understood previously, especially by including historical perspectives and voices of all peoples who have called this land home.

Since 2015, all Canadians have been called upon by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada to increase their awareness about the legacy of residential schools and colonialism in Canada. Canadians recognize that more needs to be done to acknowledge the centrality of Indigenous peoples in history. Indigenous connections to the land and the complexity and diversity of Indigenous cultures must command greater attention across the country. Doing so requires confronting the legacy of colonialism and its impact on Indigenous peoples as well as other minority and marginalized populations.

The discussion of the Prime Ministers Path in Wilmot is one that encapsulates all of the above. It is complex and it is challenging, but it is a conversation that provides an opportunity for community members to learn from one another, to grow, and to form a deeper understanding and awareness of our shared history through an inclusive lens, one that allows us to better appreciate experiences that differ from our own.

2.0 ABOUT THE PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

The overarching purpose of the public engagement process on the Prime Ministers Path was to provide an opportunity for the residents of the Township of Wilmot to have their voices heard with respect to their views on the Prime Ministers Path. First Peoples Group was tasked with designing and implementing the public engagement process with the objective of compiling this findings report summarizing the community's recommendations and considerations to be presented to Council for their decision on further action with regard to the future of the entire Prime Ministers Path project in the Township of Wilmot.

This section of the report provides an overview of the engagement process that took place from April 15th to June 30th, 2021.

2.1 FIRST PEOPLES GROUP'S APPROACH

First Peoples Group is guided by traditional teachings about the importance of collaboration, including the following teaching shared to Guy Freedman about traditional Indigenous ways of coming together as community to solve issue:

The Okanagan people from British Columbia have a deep tradition called En'owkin. Okanagan Elder, author, educator, artist, and activist, Jeanette Armstrong, speaks of a process that enables us to experience collaboration as the most natural and right way to do things. It is done when there are community issues that need to be solved or actions to be decided on.

The point of the process is not to persuade the community that you are right, as in a debate; rather, the point is to bring you, as an individual, to understand as much as possible the reasons for opposite opinions. Your responsibility is to see the views of others, their concerns and their reasons, which will help you choose willingly and intelligently the steps that will create a solution—because it is in your own best interest that all needs are addressed in the community. Our collective goal is to practice deep listening as a way of uncovering innovative solutions.

In all of our projects, First Peoples Group seeks to elevate the voice of community members in processes of decision making that will ultimately impact all. Our goal is to implement innovative ways to empower and elevate historically marginalized voices in community decision making processes and introduce priority considerations that communities can work toward in order to contribute to symbolic, substantive, and systemic change. It must be noted that, in community engagement processes such as this, First Peoples Group designs and implements community engagement processes where all of community can contribute their thoughts, opinions, views and recommendations on issues.

First Peoples Group is therefore a conduit for the voices of community members; our task, in these processes, is to create a safe and accountable space, to listen deeply and reflect back

what we heard. This is the approach that has been implemented throughout this engagement with residents of the Township of Wilmot.

Our methodology used has not been, and has never been, one of majority rules, but rather we have sought to elicit a balanced perspective that considers all the input that has been provided to us via community engagement activities and background document review to provide this summary of what we heard through the process that has resulted in the considerations and recommendations made in this report.

The resulting recommendations and considerations from the public engagement have been organized into three categories of action: symbolic, substantive and systemic. **Symbolic actions** show that the Township is willing to change the conversation and influence the perception that both local residents and tourists have of the Township. These actions have immediate impact on those affected. **Substantive actions** generally require dedicated resources and show a deeper commitment to change both internally at the Township and externally within the community. **Systemic actions** are significant, long-term changes in the way that the Township does business. These changes often require largescale changes including those in policies and procedures.

2.2 PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

At the outset of this process, First Peoples Group proposed a 4-step, iterative engagement plan to the community at the Township Council meeting on April 29th, 2021. First Peoples Group emphasized the importance of ensuring the process would be an iterative, step-by-step process, in which each activity would inform the next. Throughout initial engagement with the community, the engagement plan and subsequent activities were adapted to meet the engagement needs of the community. The following provides an overview of the engagement activities that were implemented by FPG to gather the extensive community input on the topic of the Prime Ministers Path project in the Township of Wilmot.

PRIME MINISTERS PATH CONSULTATION WORKING GROUP MEETINGS

The engagement process began on April 15th, 2021 with a meeting between First Peoples Group (FPG) and the Prime Ministers Path Consultation Working Group (PMPCWG). As directed by the Township of Wilmot Council and staff at the outset of this process, FPG met on minimum a bi-weekly basis with the working group which was comprised of staff from the Township and two council representatives. The purpose of these working group meetings was to ensure FPG was provided with logistical support and local-specific guidance on how to engage effectively with the community.

COMMUNITY CONVERSATION SESSIONS

Early in the public engagement process, **20 community conversation sessions** were held to collect input from key community members on the issue. The first of the community conversation sessions involved individual meetings with each of the Township Councillors and Mayor. Through these initial sessions with Mayor and Council and through input provided by

the PMPCWG, we connected with several community members, groups and organizations who have been involved in the public discussions regarding the Prime Ministers Path project.

COMMUNITY VOICES FORUM

The Community Voices Forum was an engagement activity designed to gather stories, input, opinions and recommendations from residents of Wilmot Township. Region of Waterloo residents, as well as members of neighbouring First Nations were also encouraged to participate in the conversation. The forum provided community members with an anonymous opportunity to share personal stories regarding the Prime Ministers Path as it relates to them personally and to the Township of Wilmot.

The discussion regarding public history installments is complex. Through the Community Voices Forum, FPG provided a preamble that included multiple educational sources discussing the issues that many Canadians are currently engaged with. Forum participants were encouraged to take the time to explore these resources prior to sharing their stories with us.

The Community Voices Forum launched on May 21st and remained live for a 4-week period, closing on June 18th at 11:59pm (EST). Due to the Covid-19 restrictions and specifically the provincially mandated stay-at-home order, First Peoples Group was limited in their ability to conduct a deeper engagement strategy, however, the Community Voices Forum provided space for residents to share as much or as little detail about the issue at hand.

First Peoples Group implemented a number of ways to participate in the Community Voices Forum to ensure it was as accessible as possible. In addition to the online forum, residents were able to print, scan and email submissions, or request a paper copy of the which could be delivered back to the Township office or to the Wilmot Family Resource Centre. The Community Voices Forum was also slightly adapted to involve two classes of students from a local Wilmot Township school to ensure the voices of youth were included in the public engagement process (see section 3.1). All methods of submitting to the Community Voices Forum were utilized.

In total First Peoples Group received 461 submissions to the Community Voices Forum.

Our team at First Peoples Group heard from a number of concerned residents hoping that this engagement activity would be centred around the voices of Township residents. We are pleased to report that more than 98% of responses indicated a strong connection to the Township either as current or former residents and that less than 2% of respondents indicated they were from outside of the Township. This signifies the desire held by residents to engage in issues that are deeply affecting their community.

FIRST PEOPLES GROUP BI-WEEKLY UPDATES

From the outset of the engagement process, First Peoples Group made a commitment to the residents of Wilmot to provide clear communication about the engagement process. FPG

published four updates which included timely information on the engagement process. Updates were published on the Township of Wilmot website and social media pages and promoted through a vast network of community contacts and local media including newspaper and radio.

DOCUMENT REVIEW

As directed by the July 27, 2020 Council Resolution that set forth the direction for the Township to engage in a public consultation process First Peoples Group was provided with instruction to explore a number of considerations and documents to help inform this final report.

The relevant information in the resolution as it pertains to document inclusion in this report reads:

“... to efficiently aid the process and to prevent further trauma to the Indigenous community who previously provided input on these statues, the comments and reports from the University of Wilfred Laurier and the City of Kitchener will be entered as relevant material for inclusion in the final report along with the transcripts of Indigenous delegates’ presentations to council during the July 13, 2020 Township of Wilmot Council Meeting and all presentations from Createscape Waterloo Region.

... AND FURTHER that all Wilmot Township data gathered from the Prime Ministers Path school group post-visit surveys tracking usage and educational value, tourism impact surveys assessing benefits to local businesses, donated-land asset financial reports ensuring continued return on investment to Wilmot Township’s residents as well as overall tourism and educational benefits cited as the fundamental basis for installing the Prime Ministers Path Project, and specifically the Sir John A. Macdonald statue be submitted as relevant material for inclusion in the Indigenous consultant’s presentation and staff’s final report to council.”

As per the resolution, First Peoples Group has reviewed and included in this report, insights gleaned from the Laurier University Report as well as the results from the City of Kitchener public consultation. Furthermore, we were provided with the transcripts noted in the resolution and have reviewed these for relevant material taken into consideration in this report.

With regard to the additional documents that were to be made available to First Peoples Group including the multiple forms of survey data, First Peoples Group were made aware that this data does not exist. Through this public engagement process, it was made known that upon the signing of the agreement with Createscape that negotiated the transfer of ownership of the statues project to the Township, staff were not informed of the terms of the agreement regarding the Township’s role specific to educational requirements for the project. Staff were of the understanding that the educational component was being provided through an arrangement with Createscape and their resources.

We understand that it was publicly known that the project was not to cost the Township any taxpayer dollars. As a result, staff were not provided with any new responsibilities other than

supporting unveiling events. Since staff were never directed to provide or create the educational programming associated with the Prime Ministers Path, nor to issue or track survey information as spelled out in the Createscape/Township Agreement, there is no available information that was provided nor considered in this regard.

3.0 FINDINGS – WHAT WE HEARD

This section presents the key themes that arose throughout the public engagement process. These themes directly surfaced from the community conversations and stories shared through the *Community Voices Forum*. The voices of Wilmot Township residents have been prioritized in this report and substantiated by additional documents that were either required or recommended to First Peoples Group to be entered as relevant material for inclusion in this final report.

3.1 YOUTH PERSPECTIVE – SETTING THE CONTEXT FOR THE FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

At First Peoples Group, we strongly believe in and honour the voices of the young people in our communities. We believe that we can no longer promote and perpetuate the cliché that youth represent the leaders or workers of the future. In reality, youth are more engaged in their communities than ever, well educated about current issues the globe is facing, and passionate about building a bright future for not only themselves but for generations to come. Young people can and must be upheld as leaders now. This is why, at First Peoples Group, we consistently seek to create space for the voices of young people at all decision-making tables we have a seat at.

Guided by our determination to elevate youth voice and as per many recommendations from the PWPCWG as well as from Councillors, First Peoples Group engaged with staff at the local schools in Wilmot Township. From these conversations we were able to engage two classes (54 students) from a local Wilmot Township school directly with regard to the topic of the Prime Ministers Path consultation. The Community Voices Forum was adapted to fit within the current conversations being had through the school’s curriculum regarding community and inclusiveness.

WHAT WE HEARD

Using an interactive online platform that the students use for other classroom activities, the students discussed and answered the following three questions:

- What does Wilmot mean to you?
- What does the Prime Ministers Path in Wilmot mean to you?
- What solutions might you have to offer for the future of the Prime Ministers Path?

WHAT DOES WILMOT MEAN TO YOU?

Young people in Wilmot feel strongly about their community. When asked “what does Wilmot mean to you?”, youth residents most commonly expressed that Wilmot is a friendly, welcoming, and safe community. Many students shared that Wilmot is a place where their families have chosen to raise them, that it is a special place, and that Wilmot is where they can make memories with their friends and relatives. Young people in Wilmot shared that their perspective of their community is one where everyone is welcome, that the community can support one another, and is a loving community. Figure 1 below depicts a word cloud of the

most common words and statements that were shared by the students when they were prompted to reflect on what their community means to them.

Figure 1: "What does Wilmot mean to you?" - Youth Responses



WHAT DOES THE PRIME MINISTERS PATH IN WILMOT MEAN TO YOU?

In responding to questions that prompted students to think about what the Prime Ministers Path means to them, they responded with the following statements organized into the categories of:

- Support to remove the PMP
- Indifference to the PMP
- Support for the PMP

Student Comments - Support to Remove the PMP

Some students expressed that due to the harm done to marginalized populations by the Prime Ministers who are represented in statue form, that the statues should be taken down. One of the primary reasons for doing so, according to student participants, was that the statues themselves continue to inflict harm on community members. One student said, *"I think it brings too many bad thoughts and memories for some people."*

- *"We should be respectful to those who suffered in residential schools therefore it should not be there."*
- *"A statue is for someone to be honoured, not a horrible person."*
- *"We shouldn't have a statue up that inflicts generational trauma for other people."*
- *"A statue should be someone who has made a good impact on everyone and not just a group of people. Not someone who has done awful things to specific people."*
- *"Sir John A. Macdonald knew about the deaths of those 200 kids and probably more. He assimilated the Indigenous community and that cannot be forgiven."*
- *"It is our history. I completely disagree with the statue of the person who made residential schools. I was unaware but now that I am aware I believe they need to be taken down."*
- *"I didn't really care that it was there until there were people who were vandalizing it. Now I think that it should not be there because of what he did."*
- *"Ignorant toward Indigenous history from a governmental perspective. Prioritizing white leaders instead of learning about Indigenous history."*
- *"Depending on Sir John A. Macdonald's past contributes to indigenous culture in Wilmot, it should be torn down."*
- *"He should not be celebrated for the things he did."*
- *"I have heard of the statue previously and I think it needs to leave. He was a terrible person we should not celebrate him with a statue."*

Student Comments – Indifference to the PMP

While some students had strong feelings on either side of the statues argument as to whether to continue or discontinue the project, other students shared that they are indifferent and also unaware of the project all together.

- *"I don't go to Castle Kilbride ever."*
- *"It would mean nothing to me. I would never see it and if I did, I wouldn't care."*
- *"Didn't really care, but I think there could be more benches."*
- *"I've never heard about it because no one has talked about it around me."*
- *"Zero intelligence on who/what this is until now."*

Student Comments – Support for the PMP

Finally, some students offered their support for the Prime Ministers Path. For the most part, students who support the Prime Ministers Path recognized that the installation has potential to raise awareness and education. However, in speaking to the educational components of the statues one student shared that there was not enough information or resources as it currently stands, *“at first I figured the statues would get vandalized. Once there was more added, I thought it was a good way to learn about the history of the Prime Ministers but there wasn’t enough information where the statues stand.”*

“I think it has a lot of history so we should keep it.”

“I think the statue should stay because John A Macdonald was our first prime minister and he was important.”

“Should stay to educate people of what happened back then.”

“The statue could bring awareness to the community about this topic. It can be there for educational purposes because not many people, including myself don’t know enough and would like to learn more.”

“I don’t think it should be taken down because it’s a reminder of our terrible past and I don’t think we should try to forget that.”

WHAT SOLUTIONS MIGHT YOU HAVE TO OFFER FOR THE FUTURE OF THE PRIME MINISTERS PATH?

Wilmot students who participated in the public engagement process provided their ideas and solutions that they feel are best for the future of the Prime Ministers Path and for the community of Wilmot as a whole. The considerations provided by these young people are categorized into the following:

1. Discontinue the Prime Ministers Path
 - a. Discontinue the Prime Ministers Path with suggestions to relocate and what to replace the statues with
2. Continue with the Prime Ministers Path with suggestions to improve educational components or alter the installation

1. Considerations from Youth to Discontinue the Prime Ministers Path

“We should take it down because the people who were affected shouldn’t have to relive trauma every time they see it.”

“Wilmot is a very respecting and diverse community. It does not matter who he is or what he did. He was racist and changed the Indigenous community forever.”

“In my opinion, I do not think that this is appropriate to have the statue stay. It basically is a reminder of all the times and that is disgusting. For anyone who has gone through that they would not want to see that I would think.”

“I believe that we should take the statue down. The human rights violations committed inside of the facilities that John A Macdonald created himself should go now as a dark time in Canadian history.”

1a. Considerations from Youth to Discontinue the Prime Ministers Path with Suggestions to Relocate & What to Replace the Statues With

“I like the idea of putting it in a museum because while it’s a bad thing whether we like it or not it happened in history and people should be educated on all the things our leaders did, no person should just be taught the good or just the bad, you should know both.”

“Put it somewhere where people can go to see it willingly and add all the history.”

“We should take it down and put it somewhere else and teach about what he has done. Teach why it is wrong and how we can move on from it.”

“The museum idea is good because people can look at it and think about if they want and not everyone needs to see it.”

“Make it a choice to see it or not. It being out in the open can be offensive to a lot of people.”

“I believe it is important we remember all the Prime Ministers, good or bad, because they are what shaped today’s Canada, and that can’t be forgotten, but a statue may be a bit much. Maybe something in a museum where less vandalism may occur.”

“Put it in a museum.”

“Stop idolizing colonizers and white government and instead place these statues in museums along with significant indigenous leaders such as Louis Riel.”

“I would say keep them inside so people can look at them by choice because if they are outside, some people might not want to see them.”

“Put another statue of someone who deserves it or have been impacted by the history.”

“Have something to acknowledge the past, but not him. What he did was/is unforgivable.”

“Have something to remember it by but not a statue.”

“More information about the Prime Ministers should be posted maybe without statues”

2. Considerations from Youth to Continue the Prime Ministers Path with suggestions to improve educational components or alter the installation

“I think it should stay but be covered in red paint.”

“I didn’t even know it existed. Until recently when the issues started. I think it should stay because it is a part of our history but they should do something about it.”

“If it is going to be put up/stay up there should also be a statue commemorating those who had struggles and showcase the truth not what has generally been shown to the public.”

“Yes, we should keep the statue... but put red paint over him it symbolizes the blood of the people he tortured this would come to a compromise of keeping a statue and doing something.”

ANALYSIS OF WHAT WE HEARD FROM YOUTH IN WILMOT

We heard that young people are passionate about their community. Their perception of Wilmot is one that is quite positive. They have expressed that Wilmot is a safe, friendly and welcoming community. However, the young people in the community recognize the division that has resulted since the Prime Ministers Path project was installed in Wilmot with one student expressing that, *“it has caused a lot of controversy between people with different belief systems and backgrounds.”*

With progressing education systems, advancing technology and social media connections available to younger generations, young people in Wilmot are more informed about and engaged in the issues that face not just the Township but global issues as well.

The students that participated in the Community Voices Forum offered a number of considerations for what to do with the Prime Ministers Path moving forward. For the most part, these young people suggested that it would be best to remove the statues from their current location and relocate them, preferably to a museum, where individuals can have the choice to visit the installation. These students recognize the harm that the statues can inflict on marginalized populations, specifically the Indigenous community, and that removing the statues can support their vision of a safe and inclusive community.

Additional considerations offered by these young Wilmot residents included keeping the Prime Ministers Path in its place but altering the installation by drawing attention to the key pieces of education that are currently missing from the path.

What was shared by this group of young people in Wilmot closely mirrored what we heard throughout the remainder of the public engagement process. By elevating the voices of young people in this community, we hope to draw attention to the future of Wilmot Township that these young people will inherit.

3.2 EDUCATIONAL VALUE

The educational value of the Prime Ministers Path came up as one of the key themes throughout the engagement process.

WHAT WE HEARD

The following presents a glimpse of what we heard from residents of Wilmot with regard to the educational value of the Prime Ministers Path. One grouping of comments argued that the Prime Ministers Path is an educational installation. The second grouping provided explanations for the ways that the Prime Ministers Path fails to be educational. Finally, presented within this section is a sub-theme within the topic of education that arose throughout the public engagement process regarding a shift in perspective and understanding.

<u>The Prime Ministers Path is Educational</u>	<u>The Prime Ministers Path Fails to be Educational</u>
<i>"It is wonderful to have such a rich history locally available to our community!"</i>	<i>"Indigenous people in our community shouldn't be subjected to re-traumatization anytime they walk through their community – even if it is under the guise of educating others."</i>
<i>"I have walked the path many times in Wilmot and each time had a conversation with at least one other person about one or several of the prime ministers with my spouse, my children, a friend. I have heard others having conversation and heard a young child ask their mother "who is this" as they touched the statue and took pictures."</i>	<i>"It should not go unnoticed that Laurier University, one of the preeminent learning establishments in the country, rejected the idea that the PM Path as proposed could provide in depth education."</i>
<i>"This is a wealth of information and history lessons when you walk this path."</i>	<i>"HIStory has been written by white men. It has been written with power and privilege. It has been written from an extremely biased perspective. Much of the true "history" of our country is lost, but we have a chance now to listen to the unwritten stories, and learn in a more balanced way. My children deserve to know truth, and not only the male settler stories."</i>
<i>"Even with the concerns that have been brought forward, I still strongly believe that</i>	<i>"Those who think it is erasing history... There are no statues of Hitler and we still know who he was."</i>

<p><i>we cannot change history, we can learn from it, do better and then move on.”</i></p>	
<p><i>“The statutes represent many things. Having educational signage, links and components to each of the prime ministers on the path, allows people to come to learn about the leaders of our country; to learn about the good, the bad and the ugly of each prime minister.”</i></p>	<p><i>“We walked around and tried to teach our son about each of the people portrayed by statues on the path. What we found were plaques that were incomplete and shared a completely whitewashed version of their contribution to Canadian history.”</i></p>
<p><i>“It's a nice park to walk through and the statues serve to educate. I happen to have a degree in history and I find the path a nice way to introduce my children to the accomplishments of our past leaders.”</i></p>	<p><i>“Advocates for the PM Path say it is an educational project; its opponents say it fails in that respect. I've heard and read comments from local residents who have said they have visited the statues in Baden and then gone home to read about the Prime Ministers. In other words, their education didn't come from the statues themselves, but from reading articles, websites and books, and watching videos online. Knowledge can be gained without the statues in Baden, if the desire to learn exists. According to its contract with Createscape, the Township of Wilmot is the partner that is responsible for the educational component of the PM Path.”</i></p>

One of the Community Voices contributors provided their analysis of the current debate taking place amongst Township residents with regard to the educational value of the Prime Minister's Path. Here is their take on the topic:

“Burned into my psyche is the comparison of the Sir John A. Macdonald statue to that of putting a hypothetical statue of Hitler in the middle of the Jewish Ghetto in Germany. As a Settler, I have no frame of reference to the depth of hurt the SJAM statue causes people who have been directly affected by his actions. The same can be said of Japanese Canadians and Wm Lyon McKenzie King or Italian Canadians and William Lyon Mackenzie King -both who still bare generational trauma from his actions.

So, it begs the question: why would we want to inflict harm on our neighbours? There is no good reason in my view but let me refute a few that I've heard.

1. To dismantle is to erases history. No, we had history before 2015 when the first statue went up. History did not start when our then-Council and Mayor snuck the statues through quietly when they knew other municipalities refused the potential train-wreck.

2. You're judging yesterday's leaders by today's standards. Yes, we are because we are a kinder and more knowledgeable society than they were.

3. It's an educational opportunity. Yes, it could be but it isn't as it stands. There is little information on or around the statues, and to find the educational component on the township website is difficult to say the least.

4. They did great things. Yes, they did but without an accessible educational setting, looking at a statue with bird poop on its head isn't going to teach you that.

5. Six Nations are currently restoring a residential school to preserve and learn from that terrible time in history so we shouldn't hide our history/statues away. Yes, they are, with copious amount of research, first person accounts, displays that provide the full history AND IN AN ENCLOSED SPACE so those too traumatized can take it in when they are ready.”

-Wilmot Resident from the Community Voices Forum

Much of what we heard from the residents of Wilmot was consistent with findings in the Laurier report which found that the Prime Ministers Path, as it is presented, fails to provide the quality of education necessary to explore the complex histories of these individuals represented in statue form:

“As conceived, this project is unlikely to successfully provide opportunities for the intellectual inquiry and critical reflection necessary to understand the full context of the individuals, the complexities of their historical significance, and how this specific narrative of Canadian history interacts with a contemporary, diverse and inclusive understanding of Canada.”

- Special Advisory Committee to the President Final Report on the Prime Minister Statues Project, 2016

Growing Awareness and Shifting Perspectives

On May 28th, 2021, mid-way through the public engagement process, tragic news from Kamloops, British Columbia, was announced informing that Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation leaders had confirmed the bodies of 215 children were found buried in unmarked graves at the former Kamloops Indian Residential School. The headlines shook Canadians and prompted investigations into mass unmarked graves at several other residential school sites across the country. Further, on June 24th, 2021, Cowessess First Nation announced a preliminary finding of 751 unmarked graves at a cemetery near the former Marieval Indian Residential School which operated from 1899 to 1997. At the time of the writing of this report, the remains of over 1000 children have been found and this number will continue to grow. This news is another example of the unqualified genocide that has taken place over generations in this country - and the only genocide on the planet that specifically, purposely and methodically targeted children. These recoveries provide but a glimpse into the profound pain that is still felt by Indigenous peoples today.

These discoveries impact all of Canada and serve as an incredibly important reminder that the legacy of decisions made by individuals, regardless of whether they are still living, can have impacts generations later. The way that Indigenous children were treated at residential schools was the direct result of the destructive policies implemented by the Government of Canada that sought to “kill the Indian in the child.” The remains of these 1000+ children represent many, many more who did not return home across Canada. We know this because survivors of the Indian Residential School system have told these stories before. It has been 6 years since the release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report which included 6 Calls to Action related to missing children and burial information.

At the time of the news coming out of Kamloops, First Peoples Group issued a statement to the residents of Wilmot stating our understanding and acceptance that many Canadians simply did not know or are only now learning about some of the horrors of the Indian Residential School policy.

First Peoples Group recognized that perspectives of Wilmot residents may have shifted with the news of the confirmation of the bodies of 215 children found buried in unmarked graves at the former Kamloops Indian Residential School. With that, residents of Wilmot who had already participated in the engagement activity were encouraged to revisit the Community Voices Forum to share their thoughts and perspectives if they were impacted by the stories being shared out of Kamloops. Comments below reflect the sentiments of many residents who resubmitted to the Community Voices forum, mirroring the shift in awareness of Canada’s full and honest history that is happening across the country.

“The PMP needs to end. Wilmot should show some respect to Indigenous people and cancel the entire project. I was a supporter of the project in its early stages, but now that I’ve done some learning and especially in light of this weekend’s tragic discovery, I feel Wilmot should cancel the project in its entirety. Move it to a museum, out of sight from people that are traumatized by them.”

“The recent discovery of the child victims of unthinkable abuses of the Residential School system should be reason enough to not force anyone to have to walk by a monument to the architect of that genocide. Especially since the discrimination and against Indigenous peoples is ongoing and not a thing of the past.”

“As a result of the devastating news about the discovery of 215 bodies of Indigenous children in an unmarked grave at the Kamloops Indian Residential School, I would like to make a second submission with my revised opinion of what should be done with the John A MacDonald statue. I originally recommended that the statue be relocated from the front lawn that borders Snyder’s Road to the back lawn to be with the other Prime Ministers. I am now reconsidering my opinion and am torn.”

“Now that I know more about MacDonald’s role as the architect of the Residential School system whose purpose was to remove the “Indian” from the child, which we now recognize as genocide, I can better understand why some people would like to remove his statue permanently. Why would we as Canadians want to honour anyone whose actions resulted in so much harm and death and destruction to generations of Indigenous people?”

“I completely disagree with the statue of the person who made residential schools. I was unaware but now that I am aware, I believe they need to be taken down.”

“In my opinion a change of focus is not only needed but with the horrific discovery of unmarked graves, urgently so.”

“I was not fully aware until this topic and I do not agree with the statue being there. It was a horrible time in life and I do not think we need a statue.”

“I used to think the statue should stay up. Now learning about the genocide committed by him, I believe that the statue should be torn down.”

“The more I learned about Indigenous genocide, residential schools (the last of which was still operating during Kim Campbell’s short time as PM in 1993, and would for 3 more years), treaty abuses that continue today, and the centuries of harm brought upon Indigenous nations by colonialism and racism, the more the existence of the PM path was astonishing to me.”

ANALYSIS OF WHAT WE HEARD

It was noted that in the transfer of the Prime Ministers Path project to the Township of Wilmot, the Township was to *oversee the development and ongoing operation of an educational program that is accessible to the public with respect to the Prime Minister statues and the history of the Prime Ministers depicted in the statues, their importance to Canada and their times, that is of a quality that meets public expectations*. Again, it should be noted that we were made aware that staff responsibilities that were dictated through the Createscape/Township agreement to acquire the Prime Ministers Path, including those related to the responsibility of the Township to create an educational program, were never communicated to staff.

In considering all comments provided by residents of Wilmot Township, and in recognizing the ongoing shift in perspective Canadians are being moved to consider, it became clear that, as it stands, the Prime Ministers Path lacks capacity to provide a quality learning environment that meets public expectations. While some residents commented on the potential for future educational opportunities to be developed alongside the statues, the concerns we heard-- especially those that speak to how this project has divided the community-- far outweigh potential altering of the project in its current location.

This finding is also consistent with the consultations that were completed by a Special Advisory Committee to Laurier University on the Prime Ministers Path in 2016:

“It is important to note that those who have supported and those who have opposed the Prime Minister Statues Project have expressed the goal of educational excellence. Indeed, it has been suggested that the statues could serve to deepen the community’s understanding not only of the prime ministers themselves, but also clarify the historic and ongoing impact of colonialism on Indigenous peoples, and ensure that other low points of Canadian history such as the Chinese head tax, and the internment of Japanese Canadians during the Second World War are not buried in the ‘dustbin of history.’ However, after consultation with experts on historical pedagogy and collective memory, it has become clear that this commendable goal could not be effectively accomplished by the installation of the Prime Minister Statues Project.”

- *Special Advisory Committee to the President Final Report on the Prime Minister Statues Project, 2016*

Based on what we have heard, First Peoples Group is advising the Township of Wilmot Council to consider **immediately removing existing statues related to the Prime Ministers Path and to discontinue any future expansion or investment in the Prime Ministers Path as it exists today.**

3.3 COMMUNITY COHESION

Issues with regard to community cohesion was another common theme that surfaced throughout the public engagement process.

WHAT WE HEARD

When residents of Wilmot Township shared their stories about the impact of the Prime Ministers Path on themselves and their families, many spoke about fear and division. Individuals on both sides of the statues debate shared that, since debate sparked about the installation of the statues that the community has lacked cohesion and become a place of fear and concern for many.

- “My feeling is that anything that causes as much divide in a community as this has to go, for the health and good of the community and for the wellbeing of those who are traumatized and hurt by it.”
- “I am devastated that we are valuing statues over the wellbeing of others.”
- “I fear for what will happen to our community if the statues remain.”
- “The community division that they have caused will exist in Wilmot as long as the statues exist in Wilmot. Harm will continue to be done to both Indigenous people and the community at large, as long as they remain here.”
- “The location of the statues is in our town square and is a central location in Baden. It is a beautiful public space that should be a safe and welcoming space for everyone. It cannot be that while the SJAM statue remains.”
- “Each time I see the statues, I feel sick because of what they have done to the community of Wilmot in terms of the divisiveness they have caused. Families and friendships have been ruined by this.”
- “My daughter was not allowed to ride her bike with her friends as there were numerous White Supremacy Rallies being held at the statues. The Prime Ministers Path has created a dark mark on Wilmot and needs to go.”
- “The amount of hatred I saw in the summer of 2020 in Baden was disgusting.”
- “Baden was a great place to live before the statues came to town.”
- “I’m scared to let my children spend time in that park. Educational plaques won’t help either, they will just cost tax payers more money.”

“My family is scared to walk near the Prime Ministers path for fear of getting caught in the middle of one of the rallies on either side of the argument.”

“The statues have brought hate groups to our town and we are scared to walk our neighbourhood.”

“If those statues stay in this community, my family will sell our house and move.”

“We stay silent about this issue as we are scared.”

“We did not ask for this project and it has brought nothing but division and racism to the township.”

“I am concerned about the environment that the Prime Ministers Path has created in Baden.”

ANALYSIS OF WHAT WE HEARD

First Peoples Group acknowledges the Prime Ministers Path Project has prompted a contentious but important debate. The divisiveness of the issues reflects the passion the residents of Wilmot hold for this community. While healthy debate is important in any setting, extreme divisiveness leading to polarization is harmful to the community. This extreme divisiveness and polarization between neighbours, families, friends and all residents of Wilmot Township is what we have witnessed throughout the public engagement process.

We recognize, however, that this divisiveness and the challenges that the Township faces with extreme polarization runs much deeper than the Prime Ministers Path project alone and that by discontinuing any further commitment to the project will not erase the fear, harm, hate and division in the community. Working to restore relationships and community cohesion will take dedicated efforts. Throughout the public consultation process, we were made aware of a plethora of resources, programs, groups and organizations that exist within the Township of Wilmot and more broadly within the Region of Waterloo that can and should be utilized to begin a process of community building in the Township of Wilmot.

The following comments from residents reflect hope for future community cohesion:

“I believe the dedicated politicians in Wilmot and Waterloo Region can work together with members of affected groups and come together with a plan that mutually satisfies everyone. Let’s show we can do it peacefully, and thoughtfully. We should act with intellect, and empathy. I have faith it can and will be done, as Wilmot has always done when dealing with difficult subjects.”

“Let us together find a workable solution, where one group does not have to “win” - that is not who Canadians are, it’s what sets us apart from most other countries.”

- *“I love Wilmot dearly. And.... I am both sorely disappointed in us – as the division and nastiness over the statues continuously unfolds in increasingly ugly ways – and, in some ways, I’m glad to see this finally broken open. The statues, if nothing else, are a lightning rod for what needs to change and heal in Wilmot.”*
- *“We cannot pass this anger, hate and guilt to our children which I fear is happening. We have to show and teach our children how we can show forgiveness to one another. They are not responsible for our past mistakes. We all need to grow to be better people. To be kind, listen and care.”*

Based on what we have heard, First Peoples Group advises the Township of Wilmot Council to consider **creating a working group comprised of a balanced representation of the individuals and communities within Wilmot Township to discuss, develop and suggest plans for the implementation of next steps centred in community cohesion and healing.**

3.4 COMMUNITY CONSULTATION PROCESSES

The final key theme that was often discussed throughout the public engagement process focused on challenges in the Township of Wilmot with regard to community consultation processes.

WHAT WE HEARD

Residents of Wilmot Township who participated in the public engagement process expressed concern with the lack of consultation and transparency with which the Township came into possession of the Prime Ministers Path.

- “If Wilmot had conducted a public engagement process prior to the installation of the Prime Minister’s Path, protests and controversy could have been avoided. It is not just Indigenous residents who took exception to the specific portrayal of Sir John A. Macdonald.”
- This is the story of the pain caused by the Prime Ministers Path for Indigenous people. It is the story of the failure of the Township Council to properly think through the repercussions of the decision to accept the statues without proper consultations, after they were declined by others.
- “This project needs to stop and be moved somewhere else. We did not ask for this project and it has brought nothing but division and racism to the township.”
- “The fact that many other groups/schools/municipalities turned it down on these same grounds, and that Wilmot somehow pushed it through with very little community discourse and zero direct discussion with or respect for Indigenous community members is appalling and demonstrates willful ignorance and privilege.”
- “I was upset that they decided to bring them to Baden without consultation”
- “Despite the fact that it was intended to showcase the evolution and history of our country – which would include the wonderful democracy that Canada is – it is representative of just the opposite, a total lack of democracy in Wilmot Township. Despite the fact that consultations occurred in both other places – because the project was controversial – Wilmot’s Council and administration of the day felt this was a decision they could leave the public out of.”
- “The issue of the Prime Ministers path has been divisive to the community. Wilmot township brought this project to Wilmot without the consent of the community. Now that this has become even more divisive it has left the hurt in the community.”
- “The absence of public engagement is what has led us to this traumatic moment in time in our community.”

ANALYSIS OF WHAT WE HEARD

That such a large number of community members, in the limited amount of time that was allocated to the public engagement process, chose to participate in the engagement activities is important to note as it indicates a strong desire on the part of the residents of Wilmot to have their voices heard through such an important decision-making process. Residents of Wilmot want to be proactively engaged and consulted with on community development opportunities small or large be it Township policies or public art installations.

Once again, this theme was consistent with one that was presented in the Laurier consultation report which stated that:

“Both written and verbal submissions to the Special Advisory Committee stressed concerns with the lack of preliminary public consultation on the PMP... Civic engagement like this cannot be ignored. The resounding message heard by the Special Advisory Committee was that any potential educational benefits of the project were overshadowed by the numerous concerns expressed throughout this report.”

- *Special Advisory Committee to the President Final Report on the Prime Minister Statues Project, 2016*

This finding from the public engagement presents many opportunities to begin to co-develop community consultation processes, and increase communication and transparency between the municipal government and residents.

Based on what we have heard, First Peoples Group is advising the Township of Wilmot Council to consider **committing to transforming community engagement and consultation processes in Wilmot Township in a way that encourages greater openness, accountability and citizen participation in decision making.**

4.0 RECOMMENDATIONS & CONSIDERATIONS

The recommendations and considerations presented in this report were guided and shaped by Wilmot Township residents who were invited to have their voices heard and to share their stories as they relate to the Prime Ministers Path through this process of community engagement. In considering all 481 submissions to the public engagement process, First Peoples Group presents the Township of Wilmot Council with the following recommendations and considerations that are organized into three categories of action: symbolic, substantive, and systemic.

Recommendation for Symbolic Action

Based on what we have heard, First Peoples Group advises the Township of Wilmot Council to consider immediately removing existing statues related to the Prime Ministers Path and to discontinue any future expansion or investment in the Prime Ministers Path as it exists today.

Symbolic actions illustrate that the Township is willing to change the conversation and influence the perception that both residents and tourists have of the Township. These actions have immediate impact on those affected.

We recognize that this project has meaning for many residents of Wilmot, including volunteers who have dedicated time and resources to the project, and we assure you that the decision to put this recommendation forward was not made lightly. However, removing the statues is as an important symbolic action that will create a new space and opportunity to engage in a dialogue on how to move forward as a community without creating further harm to friends, families and neighbours within the Township.

Though this report is not making recommendations for what happens with the existing Prime Ministers Path statues (this will have to be a discussion between the Township and Createscape), the following are suggestions that we heard from many residents:

- 🗨️ *“Put is somewhere where people can go to see it willingly and add all the history”*
- 🗨️ *“One solution might be to disperse the statues to various museums and establishments across Waterloo Region, places that have the ability to provide the extensive knowledge that is required.”*
- 🗨️ *“Put them indoors in a museum, where context can be given in an appropriate way and where Indigenous people can choose to interact with them or not.”*
- 🗨️ *“I believe it will serve all of Wilmot and of Waterloo Region to dispose of all Prime Ministers statues and provide a good home for them where they can be seen as the complex individuals they have been, in an environment where those who come to visit can learn of the society as it was in their time through interaction and relevant experiences. This is possible, but it requires a new vision and probably a*

good deal of monetary investment. And it would be a great investment for our future and our society here in Wilmot. We could become a model for others. A model that could bring in tourism, the kind of people who thirst for knowledge and a taste for our real Canadian history.

Recommendation for Substantive Action

Based on what we have heard, First Peoples Group advises the Township of Wilmot Council to consider creating a working group comprised of a balanced representation of the individuals and communities within Wilmot Township to discuss, develop and suggest plans for the implementation of next steps centred in community cohesion and healing.

Substantive actions generally require dedicated resources and show a deeper commitment to change both internally at the Township and externally within the community. In reviewing all submissions to the public engagement, it was rare that comments indicated preference to see the Prime Ministers Path remain in position, exactly as is, with no alterations to the installment. Rather, residents of Wilmot Township articulated forethought and creativity for developing a space within Wilmot Township that can be utilized by all for the purposes engaging in healing and for rebuilding community cohesion.

It is First Peoples Group's recommendation that this action be community-led with intentions of ensuring next steps are developed from the ground up, rather than through political or organizational processes. A basic principle of municipal governance systems is the active involvement of residents in civic decision-making processes.

Working groups are an integral part of public involvement and public engagement. It is important to note that working groups are separate and distinct from a council struck committee as defined by the Ontario Municipal act where 'committee' means *"any advisory or other committee, subcommittee or similar entity of which at least 50% of the members are also members of council."*

Rather, a working group is resident-led, advisory in nature and are formed with inclusive and diverse representation from the community, including Indigenous and non-Indigenous residents, visible minorities, new Canadians, 2SLGBTQQIA+ folks, youth, and residents living with disabilities. A working group of this nature may be facilitated by an external third party who has relevant knowledge of and relation to the community.

Investing resources into the creation of a community-led working group can lead to several substantive actions such as:

- Identifying what can be done with the location of the current Prime Ministers Path once the statues have been removed in a way that will appeal to all residents of Wilmot Township

- Developing an inventory of resources and programming that already exists that promote community healing
- Researching and making recommendations for new educational programs and/or artistic projects that the Township could create or make space for

Some suggestions that have already arisen from this public engagement process including the following comments that were presented by residents of Wilmot:

“I would retire the statues and work with various community members, centering the voices of Indigenous and other marginalized folks, to engage in a slow, deep process of exploring what other kind of space could be created if there needs to be a “replacement” project. This should not be rushed.”

“Consider the development of an educational installment that is advanced in partnership with all of community and led by the local Indigenous community to install.”

“Have a healing circle where Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples come together for healing and forgiveness.”

“It could be a garden of history, an environment that displays more than just a Prime Minister’s path but also residential schools, potlatches “stolen”, the lived experience of First Nations people - the full story! It could be a space for engagement, focus and learning with buttons connecting to a voice of a hunter, a woman, or an elder telling a story. There could be plants showcasing the land, stories with the faces of history.”

As previously stated, First Peoples Group recognizes, that the divisiveness and challenges that the Township faces with extreme polarization runs much deeper than the Prime Ministers Path project alone and that by discontinuing any further commitment to the project will not erase the fear, harm, hate and division in the community. Working to restore relationships and community cohesion will not only take dedicated efforts but it will also take time. This work cannot and should not be rushed, which is why we also suggest taking pause on this recommendation for a period of time to allow for the time for reflection prior to moving forward with next steps.

Recommendation for Movement Toward Systemic Action

Based on what we have heard, First Peoples Group advises the Township of Wilmot Council to consider committing to transforming community engagement and consultation processes in Wilmot Township in a way that encourages greater openness, accountability and citizen participation in decision making.

Systemic actions are significant, long-term changes in the way that the Township does business. These changes often require largescale changes including those in a policies and procedures.

Investing in civic engagement and outreach provides residents with a say, beyond the ballot box, on the development of policies and services that affect their lives. There is growing public demand for increased accountability and transparency which requires a shift in how local

governments engage with their residents. Well-designed and implemented, broad-based community engagement and consultation is proven to lead to positive community outcomes including:

- Increased satisfaction with government performance
- Enhanced trust in civic institutions
- Ability to co-create more robust and resilient solutions to community issues

Much work and research has been done, including directly within Waterloo Region, with regard to enhancing public involvement. Results of this work show that commitment to community engagement and consultation “proves critical for eliciting and understanding of community needs and strengths, stronger services, greater innovations in problems-solving, improved government accountability, and ultimately more democratic methods.”¹

Throughout our process of engaging with residents of Wilmot Township, it also became abundantly clear that the young people within the community want to be involved in the conversations and decisions being made on their behalf. In any future deliberations on the development of a community engagement and consultation processes or protocols, it may be prudent to ensure that space is created for the voices of the young people in the Township of Wilmot.

¹ McGee, S. (2009). *Understanding best practices for community engagement in municipal contexts*. Wilfred Laurier University. <https://scholars.wlu.ca/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1942&context=etd>

CONCLUSION

History is ever changing; we have witnessed this throughout the process of this public engagement. History has been and will continue to evolve, even as we draft this report.

All Canadians, including citizens of Wilmot Township were shocked by the discoveries of some 1,000 Indigenous children in mass graves on the grounds of two Indian Residential Schools: the Kamloops Indian Residential School in British Columbia, and the Marieval Indian Residential School in Saskatchewan. First Peoples Group suspects that in the months to come after our report is tabled, as many as 20,000 children's bodies may be found as communities conclude searches at the former 139 Indian Residential Schools across this country.

There is no question that these two discoveries have had an impact on what all Canadians think about the relationship with Indigenous peoples. This tragic news also shifted perceptions around the Prime Minister's Path in Wilmot Township. One of the most profound realities is the knowledge that the policies of all federal governments led by all past and present Prime Ministers alive up until the last school closed in 1996 could have, but did not, put an end to the Indian Residential School system.

Those that would like to see the Prime Ministers Path continue may now be struggling with how to best place the educational intent of this project. Those that would like to see the Prime Ministers Path project end have, in their words, proposed a different way to position the educational intent of this project.

In this report, First Peoples Group has put forward three considerations on how, to the best extent possible, to find a way forward where consensus might be able to be achieved. We were struck by the foresight of youth who offered a common sense, and what we believe to be a workable approach to work towards community consensus.

Wilmot students who participated in the public engagement process provided their ideas and solutions that they feel are best for the future of the Prime Ministers Path and for the community of Wilmot as a whole. And we agree with them.

For the most part, the wishes of the youth are to discontinue the Prime Ministers Path with suggestions to relocate the statues, as well as suggestions for what to replace the statues with. Youth who suggested the Prime Ministers Path continue to remain in Wilmot also provided suggestions to improve educational components and other creative ideas that may support the healing of the community.

What was shared by the youth of Wilmot closely mirrored what we heard throughout the remainder of the public engagement process and we urge the citizens of Wilmot to honour the youth in your community.

The work that will result from the considerations First Peoples Group has put forward to the Township Council will not be easy work, but Wilmot has the potential to show Canada that healing and reconciliation can be done in a good way. This work must start with individuals, families and communities making a commitment to work through their personal biases, to work together on how to best educate their citizenry. Engaging in this work will perhaps one day create spaces that allow all to come together to learn about Canada's true history and really get to know each other in a good way.



APPENDIX A – THE COUNCIL FOR THE TOWNSHIP OF WILMOT JULY 27, 2020 RESOLUTION

WHEREAS the Indigenous Peoples of Canada's emotional toll brought to light by the unbalanced historical representation within the Prime Ministers Path, and specifically the Sir John A. Macdonald statue located on Wilmot Township property on the lands of the traditional territory of the Neutral, Anishnaabeg, Haudenosaunee and Mississauga peoples, requires an open and transparent dialogue to address concerns, generational suffering and factual historical omissions.

AND WHEREAS all stakeholders and partners of the Prime Ministers Path Project, and specifically the Sir John A. Macdonald statue have a collective responsibility to uphold the Township's commitment to stand with all peoples who have, and continue to experience oppression and marginalization as per the Township's unified anti-racism statement issued in a Township newsletter on July 2, 2020 and a media release on June 23, 2020.

NOW THEREFORE the Council of the Township of Wilmot hereby directs staff of the Township of Wilmot to immediately pause any further investment and expansion of the Prime Ministers Path until a sufficient, thorough, respectful and transparent consultation process is completed with accountability that adheres to the calls to action set out in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Principles of Reconciliation. The consultation process must create a safe place for all to have constructive discussions that do not infringe upon anyone's rights stipulated in The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that staff be directed to immediately relocate the statue of Sir John A Macdonald from the front lawn of Wilmot Township to a location that does not harm any members of the Indigenous community.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that staff discuss appropriate locations with the Indigenous community and report back on a relocation strategy that includes Wilmot Townships commitment to the calls to action set out in the Truth & Reconciliation.

WHEREAS given the responsibility we have as elected officials, in the Township of Wilmot to listen and respect all residents, and specifically Indigenous peoples on this matter to demonstrate an unwavering commitment to remedy past wrongs and to dutifully commit to a path of reconciliation, be it resolved that an Indigenous consultant, who will be provided an honorarium for contributing their expertise to this report, will be contracted and two(2) members of Wilmot Council will be part of the Indigenous consultant appointment process.

AND, Wilmot Township staff will meet as required with the consultant and Indigenous groups of the community and other identified marginalized group and a member of the Prime Ministers Path Project Committee in a transparent consultation process that is implemented with accountability and where all members have equal rights, privileges, and obligations to have a beneficial dialogue to discuss concerns, generational suffering and factual historical omissions.

AND, to efficiently aid the process and to prevent further trauma to the Indigenous community who previously provided input on these statues, the comments and reports from the University of Wilfrid Laurier and the City of Kitchener will be entered as relevant material for inclusion in the final report along with transcripts of Indigenous delegates' presentations to council during the July 13, 2020 Township of Wilmot Council Meeting and all presentations from Createscape Waterloo Region.

AND FURTHER that all Wilmot Township data gathered from Prime Ministers Path school group post-visit surveys tracking usage and educational value, tourism impact surveys assessing benefits to local businesses, donated-land asset financial reports ensuring continued return on investment to Wilmot Township's residents as well as overall tourism and educational benefits cited as the fundamental basis for installing the Prime Ministers Path Project, and specifically the Sir John A. Macdonald statue be submitted as relevant material for inclusion in the Indigenous consultant's presentation and staff's final report to council.

FURTHER, that all Indigenous groups who accept the invitation will be provided an honorarium for contributing their expertise to the resulting report.

AND WHEREAS, the Indigenous consultant will conduct and carry out sufficient research, then present their findings in open council outlining any recommendations at the June 30, 2021 Council meeting, unless council is notified in advance of the need for an extension, that includes following the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Principles of Reconciliation upon which staff will be directed to produce a report for council's consideration for action.

