

Why a Neutrality Bylaw?

Across Canada, from the Prime Minister down to the Mayor of our little town, we have seen the rapid spread of the idea that some Canadians should receive preferential treatment. "Equal under the law" isn't enough. Some, apparently, must be promoted above others. The bylaw simply asks the government to remain neutral in public spaces.

This does not affect stores, private property, etc.



Equality vs Equity

The current Town Council believes in "Equity" whereas we believe in "Equality". Equity means that those who are seen as disadvantaged are given potentially endless special treatment. Equality means that everyone is treated the same regardless of their beliefs or genetics. One problem with ruling by equity is that democracy is founded on the ideals of equality. Another is that, with equity, the government chooses who's deserving of special treatment. History has shown the government is not always a wise arbitrator. Even if you believe the current government will never misuse this, what happens when a party you don't agree with gets in? They will now have this same power to decide who's "worthy" or "unworthy". Where the government can elevate, it can also discriminate.



The bylaw does not target any one group.

This is something even the Councillors can't help but keep saying. For example, Councilor Morie said this bylaw clearly targets one specific group but, in the next sentence, said that this will keep the town from celebrating ANY groups. Which is it - that this bylaw targets and affects one group, or that it asks for general neutrality, which affects many groups? They lament that now they can't fly poppy flags, but you won't hear them saying that it's targeting the veterans.



Then why is the bylaw about crosswalks and flagpoles?

Doesn't that show it's targeting the pride community? Unfortunately, it wasn't possible to craft a bylaw asking the government to remain neutral in all areas, so we had to make a bylaw that was short and attainable. The fact that so many big news outlets have reached out to our small town about this issue highlights that what we are fighting here is not "just a crosswalk - why make a big deal about it?" If neutrality needs to start in the small towns and work its way up, so be it.



Westlock residents have the privilege of setting an example for the rest of Canada and voting for government neutrality and equal respect for all.

Get out and vote Feb 22nd!

When we act together, combining the power of community and of our votes, we put the power back into the hands of the people!

Join the network and sign up for alerts at www.westlockneutrality.com

Across Canada, from the Prime Minister down to the Mayor of our little town, we have seen the rapid spread of the idea that some Canadians should receive preferential treatment. "Equal under the law" isn't enough. Some, apparently, must be promoted above others. This is the idea of "equity". As Interim Mayor Jamaly said, "We believe in equitable governance over neutral governance." **Let's stop and consider what that actually means.**

He believes the government SHOULD be allowed to discriminate and play favourites. **If anyone comes along asking for everyone to be treated equally, they will be labelled as against the government's current pet group.** The government, of course, gets to choose who is deserving of this special treatment. Now, they base their favouritism on whether or not a group is a minority or has suffered. But "who has suffered most" is not a game to play to build a thriving society.

It seems it's no longer enough to just believe that everyone is worth respect regardless of their beliefs or genetics, but that we must elevate some above others to "make up for" past inequality. This is the stuff of anti-racism. As a black woman, my "race theory" is "Have you ever personally owned a slave? No? Have I ever personally been a slave? No? Then no reparations are needed. You are not responsible for anyone else's actions. I am not defined by other's experiences. Let's grab coffee."

Now I'm not saying there aren't people who have experienced racism on a personal level. And I'm not saying that those of the pride and trans community have not experienced prejudice on a personal level. But let me emphasise: **this does not make it right for the government to step in and start promoting certain humans over other humans.**

The crux of the matter is that they believe in Equity and we believe in Equality. Equality means everyone is treated the same way. Equity means those who are seen as disadvantaged are to be given special treatment. The trouble is, democracy is founded on the ideas of equality.

Councilor Keyes likened the way they're supporting the pride community to when one of her kids needs extra help with their homework and so she gives them extra time and attention. I would like to offer a more accurate analogy drawn from my own life.

My half-sister and I were raised together by our amazing single mom. My sister's father was white while mine was black. **If the type of Equity the Town Council wants had been played out in my family,** my mother would have told us my entire life that I was less privileged than my sister and needed special treatment to make it fair. My sister is also 5 years older and bigger and stronger than me, so it's even more inequitable. My sister would have been told that it was insensitive to put up decorations celebrating her birthday as she was white and bigger, but that my birthday should be made a big deal of. It wouldn't be enough that my sister cared for me and never treated me as less than her. In the shared spaces of the house, a big picture of me would have been put on the wall. Any requests by her to be treated as an equal daughter would have my mother immediately grounding her and telling her she was a bigot and targeting me with discrimination.

How much harder would this make it to have peace in our home? How much harder would this make it for my sister and I to feel close? **How much would this have negatively shaped my own self-perception growing up?**

Perhaps the government is choosing a group that you approve of to promote today. But what happens if a party you don't like gets into office, and now they have the power of promotion and discrimination? Who will they decide is "worthy" or "unworthy"? You may not agree with their choice, but it is very hard to take back power once you have given it to the government.

People ask, "don't you care about how this will affect the kids who painted this crosswalk?" As a mother, my answer is a heartfelt "yes!" Yet, as a mother, I know that it is better to say no to something I can see will hurt kids in the future far more than my "no" will hurt them in the present. And **allowing the government to sway away from neutrality will affect ALL future children.** As an adult, it is my job to make decisions with an eye to the repercussions that will ensue, even if the kids cannot see it.

The neutrality bylaw does not target any one group, something the councilor's themselves cannot help but accidentally keep saying. Acting Mayor Jamaly (our previous anti-neutrality mayor resigned shortly after our petition for a neutrality bylaw received far more than the required signatures) also said, "Only one thing will change if this bylaw passes... we will take the colours of the collected voice... and we will paint over them." I guess this invalidates former Mayor Leriger's comment that "we would not be able to fly flags of the Canadian Military or of our schools, of the poppy for Remembrance Day or flags marking the Christmas season, as well as the Treaty6 Metis and pride flags"?

Which is it - that this bylaw targets and affects one group, or that it asks for general neutrality, which affects many groups? THEY have made this all about the pride and trans community. They were the ones who chose this group. Had they wanted to paint a Black Lives Matter or a Buddhist crosswalk, we would have taken issue with that as well. **Using the pride and trans community as a shield** for their actions is harming the very ones they claim are the most vulnerable.

They have forfeited any right to gnash their teeth over lost opportunities to honour our military, etc, due to their complete lack of interest until now. Keyes brought up that Clyde had raised an indigenous flag in 2022 and lamented that a neutrality bylaw will prevent Westlock from doing the same. She did not, however, give any reasons for **why Westlock did not raise an indigenous flag at the same time or in the year since**. Where were you, oh proud supporter of the veterans and Indigenous, before our petition came along?

As we went door-to-door with the petition, the comments we received from those both for or against the neutrality bylaw were fairly Canadian and polite. However, I have never heard **such prejudice and intolerance as spewed by our council and mayor** at every opportunity. A professional response might have been to say “clearly many of our citizens (over 700) are having issues with this decision. Let’s slow down, address these concerns, and try to find a way to **move forward as a united community**.” Instead they called us a Radical Minority (an interesting thing to say considering several of these councilors were appointed to their position with less votes than the petition received). They have been **insulting, dismissive, and smug**. But, **in their minds, this is ok** because we are “those people”. The “bad guys” (with them, of course, being the “good guys”), so to ride roughshod over the people of the town who disagree with them is ok.

Councilor Morie said that “We find ourselves here because of a poorly written section of the MGA and the artful way the petition was written.” I can only assume she means that annoying part where citizens are allowed to petition and have a voice if they disagree with the council.

Councilor Wold commented how he “grew up in a neighbourhood that was very diverse and we were friends with everybody in the neighbourhood.” I wonder, how many rainbow crosswalks they must have had back then to create such a tolerant utopia.

Councilor Morie mentioned the “ensuing economic ramifications, not to mention the waste of our energy and resources.” **Democracy is a waste of energy, it seems**. Were the council so concerned about our energy and resources, perhaps they could schedule the vote for the bylaw on the same date as the byelection for the new mayor. Why is Kramer, a vehemently anti-neutrality former councilor, being rushed in? Why is the vote on the bylaw being pushed as far back as possible? Time will tell.

They’ve repeatedly said they want the people of the community to feel safe. However, **they have shown zero concern for the many people who agreed with the petition but felt too afraid to sign**. People who feared reprisals. People who said they would sign except they work for the Town and were afraid to lose their jobs. Maybe have an eye to the bullying and intimidation in your own house, Council. Or **is feeling unsafe only bad if you’re the “right kind” of government-sanctioned people?**

Is their level of shaming language in any way appropriate for one group speaking about another because they hold different beliefs? How much more inappropriate is this language coming **from elected representatives about their constituents?**

As I sat there listening to their sanctimonious speeches, it was reinforced **how much we need to demand government neutrality as a nation**. If that needs to start in the small towns and work its way up, so be it.

Jamaly quoted a list of towns in Canada who have already painted a crosswalk, as if this proved the righteousness of their actions, not seeming to realize that this illustrates what a broad-scale problem this is in Canada. The fact that CBC news, CTV news, Global News, Rebel News and the Epoch Times have reached out to our small town about this issue highlights that **what we are fighting here is not “just a crosswalk – why make a big deal about it?”**. One thing Jamaly and I can agree on: **“The gravity of what a neutrality bylaw means for other communities in Alberta”**.

I’ve put my face and name to this. That hasn’t been easy. I’m aware that this makes me a target for the leaders of our community who are much more powerful than I and for some not-exactly-impartial news outlets in Canada. But I ask you to **stretch your own courage** and stand up for equality (not “equity”!) and neutrality. For **respect for each human you meet, regardless of their beliefs**. Stand up for it in every small opportunity that comes your way. In your conversations with your neighbours. **In the February 22nd vote on this bylaw. In the January 10th election for a new mayor and council member**. Every single councilor and our mayor-hopeful Jon Kramer have taken a flying leap into Wokesville. And yes, they’re more powerful and have a bigger platform to speak from than little old you. But **you have the power of your voice and your vote. Use them**. Do not merely applaud from the sidelines.

Stephanie Bakker on behalf of the Neutrality Bylaw Team

