



Powell River City Councillor Mocks Tla'amin Language with Made-Up Place Name

Tla'amin Nation requests a serious conversation about name change following racial slur by elected official.

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Tla'amin Nation- Last week City of Powell River Councillor Jim Palm belittled and mocked the Tla'amin language and its ancestral place names by using the made-up word "Wakawana" during a discussion on changing the town's name.

Powell River is named after Israel Wood Powell, the first BC Superintendent of Indian Affairs and one of the chief architects of early colonial policies including the proliferation of Indian Residential Schools. The town's name is a constant reminder of the abuses inflicted on Indigenous children for more than a century, spurring a renaming campaign.

"We cannot let this racist slur stand. This comment is wholly inappropriate coming from an elected official and contributes to the normalization of racist remarks that make reconciliation harder than it has to be," said Hegus John Hackett.

The link to the city council meeting video is [here](#) in which Councillor Palm adopts a mocking tone as he says "Wakawana" when referring to Tla'amin place names at the three hour mark.

"We don't take mockery of our language lightly especially from a long-time schoolteacher and elected official," said Tla'amin Executive Councillor Losa Luaifoa. "Our people were taught to be ashamed of our language through the exact behaviours demonstrated by Councillor Palm and worse. This has resulted in the near loss of our language. We are working so hard to reclaim our pride and fluency in ʔayʔaʔuθəm and call on Tla'amin people and our allies to keep up their work to restore and draw attention to the beauty of our language."

The Tla'amin Nation is hopeful that the City and Tla'amin can move forward from this incident in a manner that heals and evolves their long-standing relationship.

"Tla'amin's request to restore original place names is not a joke and Councillor Palm's comment was crude and hurtful," said Tla'amin Executive Councillor Dillon Johnson, who added "We have a long and proud history of place names that are not only deeply meaningful for Tla'amin people, but all people who call this region home. We look forward to moving past this unfortunate incident and back to a serious discussion about removing the name Powell from our city."

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About the Tla'amin Nation

The Tla'amin Nation is a self-governing modern treaty nation with significant land holdings in the qathet region on British Columbia's Sunshine Coast. The Tla'amin Treaty with Canada and British Columbia came into force in 2016. The Tla'amin people have occupied the region for millennia, stewarding the land and sea in accordance with Tla'amin law and respect for the natural world. To learn more please visit <https://www.tlaaminnation.com/>.

Background - Name change process.

- At the May 12, 2021, community-to-community-to-community (3C) meeting, Tla'amin Executive Council requested the City of Powell River consider a name change in light of the devastating legacy the actions of Israel Powell has had and continues to have on the Tla'amin people.
- In November 2021, the City and the Tla'amin Nation agreed to establish a Joint Working Group comprised of elected officials and community appointees to oversee a community conversation about the proposed name change.
- The Joint Working Group conducted a community engagement process from March through June 2022.
- On July 15, 2022, Tla'amin Nation and the city released a final report on the engagement process including 11 recommendations.
- On January 16, 2024, City of Powell River tabled strategic priorities including: *"Take real steps towards a name change."*

Joint working group final report:

<https://powellriver.civicweb.net/filepro/documents/118845>

Backgrounder- Israel Powell: <https://powellriver.civicweb.net/filepro/documents/114024>

Video of Powell River City Council meeting:

<https://www.youtube.com/live/DRXYMOgtBfk?feature=shared&t=10881>