

2015 August 17

Re: Notice of Passing of a Zoning By-law 2014-395 and a Notice of Adoption of Official Plan Amendment #143 / Avis d'adoption d'un règlement 2014-395 et un avis d'adoption d'une modification au plan officiel #143

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Ontario Municipal Board Remarks

A contextual presentation regarding the future of the hotly contested Sacred Chaudiere Site

August 3 marked four years since the passing of Grandfather William Commanda. The City of Ottawa, under the leadership of Mayor Jim Watson, held its flag at half mast in recognition of the contributions and stature of this ninety eight year old man from another city, another province. Facebook noted that William Commanda reached 6,900 people on the anniversary of his death; this week, it is already over 11,000. This very week he is acknowledged in a documentary produced in France, and in a music dvd produced by a young man in Boston; a few weeks ago he was remembered in an international conference in South Africa. Just last year, Mayor Watson announced a day of reconciliation in the name of Grandfather Commanda and Nelson Mandela.

The tremendous interest in this little old man from the first reserve in Canada exists because, almost imperceptibly, he animated a peaceful social revolution. His single handed and unfunded efforts commenced decades ago; forty years of Circle of All Nations gatherings intensified after his 1995 Sunbow Five Walk for Mother Earth, from First Encounter Beach, Massachusetts, to Santa Barbara, California, home of the most notorious of missions, raising awareness about Indigenous Peoples, critical environmental issues, and engaging non-Indigenous peoples in the process, while also doing a pipe ceremony for Martin Luther King en route, and remembering the complex tragedy of Timothy McVey and the Oklahoma City Bombing.

The impact of his peaceful social revolution was felt intensely in the National Capital Region of Canada and beyond over the past three decades. He awakened Algonquins from both sides of their ancestral river, the Mighty Kichissippi, geologically the most special in Canada, as well as the other 84 Algonquin Nations spanning the continent, and other First Peoples, to their connection to the Sacred Chaudiere Site, within the heart of the continent – thousands of Indigenous Peoples from across the country returned there during the winter of 2012, affirming its magnetic pull. He also drew a diverse multi-racial and multi-cultural web of people here – this is why this matter is so critically important –

it is about an Indigenous man, but it is also about all of us who call Canada home – he invited us here and we honour the generous invitation and welcome.

Consistent with the Three Figure Friendship Wampum Belt, William Commanda reached out to federal, provincial and municipal governments and brought his Indigenous prayer, values, rights and responsibilities to their direct attention. This influence was not unnoticed, and, spontaneously it seems, he was presented with two honorary doctorate degrees and appointed Officer of the Order of Canada. The timeless reach of his knowledge and wisdom was acknowledged last year by former Governor General, Michaëlle Jean, in the creation of a William Commanda Pavilion at Ottawa University.

William Commanda had a profound impact on the City of Ottawa. He raised public awareness here and in Gatineau that the National Capital Region lies on unceded, unsurrendered and unconquered Algonquin Territory (now this makes me think – are we Settlers or Squatters?). Before him, the Gatineau Mayor and Chair of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities of the early 2000s had not heard of the Algonquins. The community of his very own direct ancestor Grandmother Commanda (alive in 1760, before the time of the Royal Proclamation of 1763), from Lac Commandant (now Lac Papineau) and the Kinogé River were the ones who asserted their rights over the land at the Sacred Chaudière Site upon the arrival of the first settler, Philomen Wright. Their spiritual leaders, the Jessakids, asked by what right he was cutting their sugar bushes. They conducted sacred ceremony to seed the friendship instead of exploitation, as instructed by the Three Figure Wampum Belt. Ironically, after the decades of desecration of the incomparable site, his daughter herself notes Philomen Wright's own last words on his deathbed **“When I look back over the past achievements of my life they are of no profit when viewed in the light of eternity. The sun that has lighted our way is going down in a cloud – a dark, dark cloud!”** Indeed an ominous statement, and we are all now beginning to fear its implications as Nature speaks louder. (ref. The White Chief of the Ottawa by Bertha Wright Carr-Harris.)

William Commanda impacted the City of Ottawa at multiple tangible and intangible levels: he planted the City's Peace Tree, blessed the Multi-faith Community, his clout was recognized by three mayors; he was capped by one Chief of Police and presided over the inauguration of another. The City's current cultural program was developed in his home in the city. He hosted countless ceremonies and educational and peace building events, including Paddle for Peace at Victoria Island. In fact, his efforts influenced the UN Peace Day revival. He advocated on critical environmental issues: he hosted the Waterlife Workshop to draw attention to the pollution of the Ottawa River; he drew attention to the plight of the American Eel and the South March Highlands; he challenged uranium mining and megadumps and impacted critical decision-making; he challenged Domtar's mega hydro expansion project at the Chaudières and initiated reports on undamming. His omni-presence and multiple contributions were acknowledged in the 2006 presentation of Key to the City on Victoria Island.

William Commanda worked intensively at his home and in the city to advocate for the two issues he knew were of critical global importance – environmental stewardship and

peace-building. His work was grounded in Indigenous ideology, but embraced the contributions of all. After years of contemplation, discussion, consultation and development, he articulated this in his vision for Asinabka in February 2010. The fully inclusive Indigenous vision called for an Indigenous centre, a peace building think tank/hotel/conference centre; repurposing of historical buildings, and a freed Chaudiere Falls and public park at Chaudiere Island – a complex integration of nature and people, Indigenous and newcomers where the footsteps of his direct ancestors had already pointed. Interestingly enough, the fundamental elements of his vision are consistent with the preeminent planning document of the City of Ottawa – the Greber Plan that gave birth to the National Capital Commission (NCC), the agency responsible for maintaining the integrity of the public space of all Canadians in the National Capital Region. The profound significance of his vision was overwhelmingly evident, and several people, including folk he did not know, worked to secure its formal endorsement by the City in November 2010. Indeed, his was a significant planning document. It has also been brought to the attention United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs and Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. A photo journal synopsis of a chronology of the work to plan and develop this initiative is available on the William Commanda Legacy – Asinabka facebook page – it is the beginning of his virtual institute of archival records. Much more detailed information is available on our websites – www.asinabka.com and www.circleofallnations.ca. I notice that many graduate students are now studying our Kindergarten Dropout with increasing passion in Canada – they are writing theses and dedicating books to him in Europe right now. Eric Smith's 2011 Masters Thesis addresses the decolonizing work undertaken by William Commanda and the Circle of All Nations at the precise site we are discussing. We have given permission for the inclusion of our digital map version of the Asinabka vision in the academic monograph, *Town and Crown: An Illustrated History of Canada's Capital*, a scholarly history of Canada's capital city, based upon archival research by Dr. David Gordon FCIP AICP P.Eng.

There was a pause in the advance of the Asinabka work with Grandfather's passing; controversial Algonquin land claim issues and questionable negotiations have clouded the natural progression of his lifetime's effort. As you know, changes in political leadership can also impact social advance. Sadly, still today, so can power rooted in colonial, neoliberal, capitalist and consumptive ideologies and corporate structures.

The decision of the City of Ottawa to initiate rezoning amendments and change the official plans at this geologically, prehistorically, culturally, spiritually and historically significant heart of the country, to move from William Commanda's vision of shared space and contemporary relationship building to privatization, condos and the creation of little Amsterdams and European malls has created widespread distress and resistance, and has also regenerated passionate interest in his work; and this is evidenced in the huge attention that five appeals of the City's decision making has drawn – this despite the fact that *our* humble efforts receive little public media attention. While many have been disillusioned by policies and decisions of the NCC over the years, it is indeed difficult to fathom their irresponsibility at the Sacred Chaudiere Site in this moment of time. Beyond the Royal Proclamation of 1763, Section 35 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, there

is the 2007 endorsement of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the controversial Algonquin land claims, and the recent work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission before our very eyes. Even the United Nations has moved beyond the old protection of historical colonial buildings to global recognition of the responsibility to protect sacred Indigenous sites, and sites of cultural and intangible heritage, and the June 2015 UNESCO AGM hosted in the capital city addressed cultural heritage issues. It is ironic to note this first at the site of the Human Rights Tribute – William Commanda himself presided over the launch of the Monument, testament to the global recognition of need for a formal declaration on human rights, in the blatant absence of the same. He welcomed his Holiness the Dalai Lama here; he recognized Grandfather's spiritual and political stature by holding his hand to his lips at that time. (Note also that William Commanda also welcomed another global leader fighting oppression and racism at this place: President Nelson Mandela). The blatant rejection on the part of the City and NCC of its Duty to Consult and its violation of the Ontario Human Rights Code of Ethics is unacceptable. The written evidence of the transference of this responsibility to consult to the developer is unacceptable. The nature of the consultations, with Algonquins and others is of dubious quality and integrity; it is also non-existent with other First Peoples across the country, who are also accustomed to paying homage at this site. The voices of non-indigenous citizens who also have a right to presence at this site that they have animated over the years is flatly ignored by our City.

We have several specific concerns to register regarding the planning decisions on Chaudiere and Albert Islands, which impact the integrity of the Sacred Chaudiere Site. But beyond this, we address the urgent need to think beyond colonial, capitalist and legal box to collectively animate a *Noble Change* from business as usual.

The core items in our appeal pertain to land ownership issues, the Duty to Consult as prescribed by the Canadian Charter on Rights and Freedoms and consultation in general.

The developer has also introduced Business Tax Exemption incentives formally into these proceedings. This latter issue raises a series of new concerns:

We question the misrepresentation, lack of integrity and downright abuse of taxpayer money regarding environmental cleanup. The developers suggest publicly that they are investing \$125,000 to clean up the Chaudiere area; and are celebrated as the brownfield gurus; a Citizen article of April 2015 points out that the federal, provincial and municipal governments are providing \$65,000 each for Ottawa River cleanup; strangely enough, the City of Ottawa even states that it is critically important to dismiss our appeals immediately to offset potential loss of Windmill access to the public purse because of upcoming changes to funding regulations. Further, the actual owners of the site, Domtar, who are responsible for the contamination, and have inserted themselves into this Ontario Municipal Board appeal, and who, according to google, are being challenged on environmental abuses elsewhere, are not held responsible for their actions.

Sadly, we are also not blind to the erosive process of norming and economical positioning undertaken with business partners, educational institutions, especially

Algonquin College, government, business, community, Aboriginal peoples, environmental groups, media, foreign partners to present a semblance of support for the take over of the Sacred Chaudiere Site. We realize this process is subtle; it was what George Grant tried to examine in his *Lament for a Nation*. Read our reflections on a William Commanda *Lament* for his country to understand this phenomena better.

During the Ontario Municipal Board hearing proper, we intend to

- give evidence of William Commanda's multi year process of planning with Algonquin communities of the Ottawa River Watershed, both on and off reserve, and with literally thousands of other people nationally and internationally; and with government, including three prime ministers;
- we intend to demonstrate his comprehensive proposal is fully consistent with the principles of the City of Ottawa's original planning mandate for the site; that his consultation process was exhaustive and documented;
- we intend to show his own ancestral line of connection to the Chaudiere Site;
- we intend to illustrate the implications of his vision for public security, health, healing, education, social justice and self respect;
- we intend to present pertinent documents, videos and his own words in video recordings as exhibits, and to call Circle of All Nations witnesses, including his daughter, to elaborate on these points.
- Finally, we note that his behest that the truth must always be told, as part of his decolonizing and transformative project, may require that multiple questionable practices by the respondent, partners and other players in their planning process be presented and challenged. It does seem that this, to date adversarial OMB appeal process, may oblige us to do so.

When William Commanda met with Domtar Corporation in 2007 to present his vision for the Sacred Chaudiere Site, he opened with a prayer, a smudge, a drum song, a video of the devastating impact of industrialization on the Saint Lawrence River, and presented his vision for reconciliation and peace building and reclamation of one waterfall in this country from further commercialization and desecration to respect for its sacred integrity and to protect the ancient extraordinary fish, the *Manoshkadosh*, the American Eel. He was told, what you are asking will not happen. William Commanda replied, I love you, my brother – we will continue to talk to explain ourselves and our stand for truth and justice, but we will not take out Boxing Gloves. The pace of his work increased in intensity and urgency because he realized what huge grounds he still had to cover to educate and transform those who had assumed control over his lands; this was his responsibility, as caretaker of Mother Earth, and he had to think creatively to engage the others in this work.

He decided to make us non-Indigenous folk his relatives, by befriending us, to introduce us to his Mother, the Earth; with relationship would come respect and responsibility, he believed and the realization that we are all children of the Earth, not aliens who hold domination over her. Canada will not find its self-respect till it transforms its relationship with Indigenous Peoples. William Commanda opened that door in the capital city.

William Commanda provided the blueprint for a future that many of us want. Present day global challenges only show how prescient he was in charting his pathway of hope in what is an increasingly dark global future: he already began, twenty years ago, drawing attention to issues that are now crises of overwhelming global proportion – environmental devastation, climate change, decimation of species, war, violence, fear, overt and systemic racism, gender issues, economic instability, financial crises, unfathomable economic disparity, health, mental health, infectious disease, club creation, social exclusion – and corruption, collusion, subterfuge and bafflegab. How much of this comprise the bitter fruit of colonialism and colonization; how is it exacerbated by globalization and growing urbanization?

One citizen inspired by Grandfather at the time of the challenge of uranium mining in the Watershed has spent this summer noting the creeping and stifling grip of condominium development over the capital city; look at the binder she has created and contemplate the multiple implications for present and future generations. We don't want to see this at the Sacred Chaudiere Site. It is also shocking to note how many appeals are registered against the City of Ottawa's planning decisions on the OMB schedule.

We begin to realize today that we human beings are hardwired to nature and to community; our health care crisis reveals that, rich or poor, we are withering physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually, beyond belief; it is the drug industry, legal or illegal, that props us up. In his animation of his vision for reconnection with nature and evolution of community, William Commanda and his Circle of All Nations has already demonstrated at the Sacred Chaudiere Site that revitalization is possible. It is no accident that the capital city in this country of such diversity is located on such special ancient meeting grounds. Just last year, ancestral energies from 6,000 years ago reawakened us to this heritage; and even today, our late Indigenous Elder points to a future of global healing and hope. Let us not think that we presume to can kill the Golden Goose without consequence, as Philomen Wright came to see on his deathbed.

William Commanda seeded countless projects and activities in the capital city and beyond and many of the young and older people you see here are the manifestation of his peaceful social revolution.

I use the term revolution pointedly – William Commanda's vision spins at the sacred Chaudiere Falls, fully consistent with the cosmic spiral; and it spins us into the time of the emergent peaceful social revolution.

The Windmill Project, Planning Decision of the City of Ottawa, our paid for-appeal, the City's Motion to Dismiss our appeals forthright and the Ontario Municipal Board process has plunged us beyond explaining our positions in a democratic process into immediate engagement in an adversarial and hostile zone.

I have just returned from South Africa, known first for its history of colonization, exploitation, racism and Apartheid, and then for its reemergence, while still with

overwhelming inequality, nonetheless without civil war. William Commanda was there in 2001. He was at the Sandton Centre in Johannesburg, and noticing the swirling of the leaves, said *something bad has happened to the world*. That was 9/11. The critical issues he wanted to address at the Sacred Chaudiere Falls have only intensified since then. He met Dr. Don Materra, a Black Consciousness activist, at a Steve Biko function then – you may remember how this brilliant man was brutally murdered. I met Dr. Materra twice during my trip. At our first meeting, he presented me with his book from 1997: *Memory is the Weapon*. At our last meeting, he talked about something else.

“We must move from a language of estrangement to a language of endearment”, he said. “Before language can become a tool of reconciliation and reconstruction, there must first be a process of self-purification. Each of us who dreams and labours for the creation of better people, better families, better societies, better nations and a better, safer world, must needs enter and pass through the cleansing fire – a purging of our emotions and our thoughts....We need a language that will accommodate the fears and anxieties of those who cannot countenance the future of a changing world”.

William Commanda himself said “The newcomers will find that they have to come and kneel before us and ask forgiveness before they and their children find peace. We must grow strong enough to respond to their needs”. He animated a language of endearment. Just yesterday, his daughter Evelyn spontaneously used the phrase Tears of Endearment. You may have seen her demonstrate that at the conclusion of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission work at Rideau Hall just as we got embroiled in Ontario Municipal Board Hearing. Not many have accomplished the peaceful social revolution as effectively as William Commanda, and through us his work will continue to manifest on his ancestral land.

Consistent with William Commanda’s vision for a *Circle of All Nations, a Culture of Peace*, we exhort the capital city of a most significant country on the world map that we all love to chart a new pathway into an uncertain future increasingly and unquestionably commanded by William Commanda’s Mother Earth, to indeed take a closer look at his legacy and find the means to inspire its partners to really move into the future he envisioned. He took his responsibility of holding the Key to the City seriously. As Rumi would say, *The door is round and open*. There is real work ahead for all of us at the Source.

GINAWAYDAGANUC! We are all connected.