

**Delegation to Wilmot Township Special Council Meeting
Monday May 12, 2025
Re: Prime Ministers Path
By: Dennis and Pat Mighton**

Good evening Mayor Salonen and councillors.

Thank you for putting the Prime Ministers Path on your agenda and for initiating the community engagement process. Thanks, also, to the LURA team for facilitating the engagement process and for providing several opportunities for us to express our opinions and listen to others. Thanks to the Working Group for the work you have done on our behalf.

We are Dennis and Pat Mighton and we are here to speak in support of returning the Prime Ministers statues to public display in Wilmot township and continuing this project.

Our friend Jim Rodger, a long-time Wilmot resident and one of the founders of the Prime Ministers Path, died one year ago last week. Jim would be pleased to see that this worthy project has been given another chance. It will benefit Wilmot Township in many ways.

Recently we have seen a surge of Canadian pride. The Prime Ministers Path, or whatever we call it in the future, has the potential to become a unique national treasure and a source of pride for all Canadians.

The statues are a lesson in history. Through these past leaders and their accomplishments we can learn the story of Canada from confederation on. We can examine the qualities that made them

effective leaders – or perhaps not so effective.

The educational component will be professionally written and will complement the Ontario school curriculum. It will be readily accessible to the casual passerby and available to those who wish to investigate further.

The statues are a valuable art collection, with work by renowned sculptors from across Canada, including Wilmot's own Ruth Abernethy. The intrinsic, artistic value of the statues, and of art in public spaces, is important.

The statues are a tourist attraction. Although there is no charge to visit the prime ministers, tourists spend money at local establishments such as Castle Kilbride, Wilmot restaurants, gas stations, and overnight accommodations. The statues will add tourist revenue and economic value to Wilmot.

The **Working Group Report** suggests a path forward with recommendations in six areas. I will comment on each of them:

1. Governance and structure:

The Working Group recommend a Community Steering Committee to oversee all aspects of the project. We suggest that members of the Steering Committee should be volunteers who have knowledge and expertise in a variety of areas (i.e. historians, legal knowledge, fundraising expertise, educators, artistic expertise.) Representation on the committee from the Woodland Cultural Centre in Brantford

might be helpful.

2. Funding: Financial sponsorship is essential. Fundraising will be the responsibility of the Steering Committee. They must look for donations and grants - local, provincial and national.
3. Inclusion: An indigenous perspective must be included as part of a collaborative approach from the start, not as a patronizing gesture and afterthought.
4. Education: The educational component will evolve. It must be accurate and comprehensive, covering significant events during each prime minister's term. Some events will instill pride, others will make us ashamed. All will help us learn about our past and about the men and women who have helped guide us through it. Detailed information can be presented on permanent plaques, and through creative, imaginative, interactive approaches that bring history to life.
5. Location: We believe the land beside this Township Administration Building is the ideal location. Castle Kilbride, former home of entrepreneur and Member of Parliament, James Livingston, is already a National Historic Site that draws visitors to Wilmot. The Prime Ministers statues would be a perfect synergistic partner to the Castle.

Appropriate landscaping, such as a cedar hedge, could shield the statues from public view. A few attractive arches would create welcoming entrance points. An accessible walkway around the perimeter, outside the protective greenery, would provide an equally attractive path through

the site for those who wish not to view the statues.

6. Truth and Reconciliation: We cannot undo the past, but we can acknowledge harm that was done. The Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission must be considered throughout – particularly in the educational component and in the location and design of the site.

Moving on to **Acting CAO Clark's Staff Report.**

We were, at first, disappointed with the seemingly negative tone of this staff report. Mr. Clark raises concerns about the feasibility of undertaking this project. He cites insufficient financial and human resources, and the fact that such a project is not within the mandate of a municipality.

As we read on, however, we were encouraged to see that the Staff Report includes ways to address and overcome these concerns. An independent Community Steering Committee could be established, which would function much like a non-profit board, overseeing the work. Council and staff may have a role in supporting the work, as a partner, but not as the direct owner.

In conclusion, Mayor Salonen and Councillors, we believe that these statues have the potential to become a unique national treasure and we ask you not to let this opportunity slip away. Yes, there are challenges, but they are not insurmountable. We hope you will find a way to return the prime ministers to Baden, for the benefit of our community now and for future generations.