

## **Response to Shekara Grant's Letter, from the Mayor of Shelburne, N.S.**

Throughout February, communities across the province have celebrated the longstanding history of those of African descent. Visiting the Black Loyalist Heritage Centre in Birchtown, for the African Heritage Month proclamation, was a timely acknowledgment of how we must learn from our past to improve the future. All of us need to engage in tough conversations to understand the truths of our shared history. And not just for one month of the year.

The Black Loyalist Heritage Centre is a powerful medium for everyone to better their understanding of the events of historical racism in Shelburne, the province of Nova Scotia, and even as racism continued in Sierra Leone. On a visit, you will learn that in 1784 the Town of Shelburne (formally Port Roseway) was the site of the first race riot in Canada, whereby white labourers rioted against black labourers, with a blind eye turned by the local merchants and British-based, white leaders.

For a post-racism society, we must all lean into the discomfort of recognizing the truths of our history and focusing on educating and embracing equity of opportunity for all members of our society going forward. In a time of extreme sensitivity to the desire of equity for all for once and for all, equity lies at the heart of it.

We need to lean into our past wrongdoings and consciously change the narrative on how we need to think in order to move forward. As a wise person said, *"History is not there for you to like or dislike. It is there for you to learn from it.<sup>1</sup> And if it offends you, even better because then you are less likely to repeat it. It is not yours to erase as it belongs to all of us."*

I write this letter to be transparent and present the facts. I commend Shekara Grant for raising her voice to influence change, but the misinformation she presented is flaming a division and tarnishing the work that is being done to create a more inclusive and equitable community. As an elected official, unfortunately, I am accustomed to hearing rumours and misinformation. And in today's social media influenced society where everyone can be a publisher, it is important to address and clarify misinformation more so than ever before.

### **The Town's role in the filming of *Washington Black***

The filming of [\*Washington Black\*](#) by Canadian author Esi Edugyan, is a unique opportunity for all residents of our province and community, as they potentially film in Halifax, Loisburg, Lunenburg, Birchtown and Shelburne. I cannot speak to the story of *Washington Black* or the opportunities for residents to contribute to its production – you will need to contact them to learn more – but I can speak to our role at the Town of Shelburne. To assist the film producers with identifying accommodations opportunities, the Town of Shelburne asked all interested homeowners to submit a form listing their accommodation details. We will provide the full list to the production company, who will select and connect directly with any owner of accommodations they are interested in.

### **Landfill and Perceived Impact on Water**

In the 1940s, the town advertised to any local landowners interested in selling their lands for a new "dump" as the five throughout town were near full. The town subsequently purchased land on Morvan Road from Mr. Douglas Jacklyn, a black member of the community, in 1945.

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<sup>1</sup> US Ret Lt.Col Allen West

The town's first-generation landfill on Morvan Road was opened for approximately 50 years, from 1946 to 1996. It was utilized by the Department of National Defence, the Roseway Hospital and Manor, residents/businesses of the Municipality of the District of Shelburne, and of course, residences/businesses of the Town of Shelburne. After the 1996 closure, the site served as a transfer station for a short time for white metals to be collected and removed. Since then, Nova Scotia Environment allowed the town to open the gate twice, in a controlled manner, for disposing of downed trees/shrubs after Hurricanes Dorian and Juan. No human garbage has been added to the first-generation landfill since 1996.

A delegate from SEED (*South End Environmental Discrimination* now *South End Environmental Injustice Society*) presented to the Town of Shelburne Council in July of 2016, citing concerns of the past and present operations of the landfill and the impact on the community. Following the filming of *There's Something in the Water*, calling out environmental racism across Nova Scotia including Shelburne, SEED requested a community well for those in the Patterson Division to be able to access clean drinking water despite no evidence showing a direct link to well water concerns from the landfill.

There is no factual evidence of higher cancer rates in the Patterson Division of Shelburne versus other divisions of the town. The "data" being espoused is based on one person's handwritten journal, that was scribed on a walkabout with hearsay, not scientific or medical evidence. This "data" has however, snowballed to become the unfalsifiable basis that has motivated actors/professors to look at Shelburne for their documentaries/studies of environmental racism.

The Town has been open and transparent with the latest request for access to the first-generation landfill by Dalhousie University, on behalf of McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, wishing to study the DNA of Shelburne residents for hereditary versus environmental cancers. A tour of the closed landfill, including a representative of a local (environmental) advocacy group, was given by town personnel. Copies of all water quality studies of nearby wells in the town's possession have been offered to Dalhousie to aid in their research.

### **Water Access and Quality – Town and Well**

Approximately 26% of the properties in Shelburne today are on town water, leaving 74% of properties throughout town using dug/drilled wells or potable containers. The water lines run through three main streets in town only, where the greatest population density and businesses exist, starting with the hospital and ending at the regional high school. Properties using wells or potable containers are similarly prevalent in all areas of town – Patterson, Parr's, North, South, and St. John's Divisions.

Perhaps what is not widely know however, is that property owners, not municipalities, are responsible to provide occupants with clean drinking water. Property owners are therefore encouraged to regularly test water quality and clean their water vessels (wells or otherwise).

Whether done by town-hired specialists, SEED-hired specialists, NSCC specialists, Dalhousie University specialists, or even independent specialists, no test has ever offered any scientific proof that demonstrates leachate from the first-generation landfill is negatively impacting nearby property owners' wells. Some wells near the closed landfill were recently retested and showed unacceptable levels of e-coli and coliform. Further samples were then sent by SEED to identify the DNA source and were found to be from family Cervidae (deer) and class Aves (birds) thereby reemphasizing the need for those property owners to be more vigilant in keeping their wells clean and tested regularly.



## Community Well

Town personnel and Council have strived to understand and work with SEED on their request to install a community well. In April 2021, we asked SEED to suggest three potential locations to allow Council to select from so that the town can grant a mutually-agreeable piece of taxpayer-owned land for a community well. The installation and maintenance of the well are being generously sponsored by actor Elliot Page and could be in place in a manner of a few months.

SEED has yet to respond with such a list but instead is determined that their community well be placed on an area of land near the power building of the tired Roger Grovestine Recreational Complex. The Town has many concerns about the location, which we have raised with SEED:

- The location is 440 meters from the first-generation landfill property line. While testing has shown the landfill has not impacted any surrounding wells, it is our understanding that this is the underlying issue for SEED, and we are concerned it will be perceived that the Town not providing an ideal location.
- The Roger Grovestine Recreational Complex is presently under-utilized and isolated on a dead-end street with limited lighting. While the area is patrolled by police, there is evidence of nefarious activities where SEED and town administration have observed during one of many meetings, used needles and the illegal dumping of residential garbage bags.
- Additionally, a water expert has noted to SEED and the town that the spot was likely not ideal for hitting water and another site would possibly be more fruitful.

We have made many attempts to work with SEED to open a community well for all residents and offered them opportunities to meet with Council. That said, the town will not participate in a community well that gives priority to some residents and discriminates against other residents due to the colour of their skin. We have refused to sign SEED's proposed contract for this reason, and instead offered to donate taxpayer land to SEED, for them to dig/drill then manage their community well.

The second reason the town offered land for SEED to install and maintain a community well is that we are not in the business of maintaining wells. From the generosity of Elliot Page, SEED has been given funding for installation and funding for professional maintenance of a community well themselves. And like every other not-for-profit, SEED can apply for federal, provincial, and/or municipal grants to cover the cost of insurance, land taxes, etc.

It is our understanding that SEED is now working with the NSCC campus on Lake Road (across from Roseway Hospital) to potentially utilize their unused well. SEED leaders are stating on social media that the town would not cooperate, so they had to go outside the town limits. This is far from the truth and locating the well at the NSCC campus disregards SEED's demands of the town, including having the well within walking distance for all residents of Patterson Division. We remain open to working with SEED to identify three potential site options within the town. If the NSCC campus is the selected location for the well, we wish them plentiful and clean water.

It is my hope that the response to this letter will be engagement, constructive dialogue, and action to improve our community for all residents. I encourage Ms. Grant to contact me or our CAO to discuss how we can work together. I suspect we share many common values that could help us bridge the gap that appears to exist.

Most Sincerely,



Harold Locke, Mayor  
Town of Shelburne

1 March 2022