

Dear Councillors,

Lest We Forget!

Like my father and so many others who signed up at 17 years old to fight so war would not reach this country, I am heartsick over the decision to move the Shubenacadie Cenotaph. These very brave young children had to grow up in short order to push back the brutal aggression of dictators who had invaded European countries.

It is hard for us today to truly understand what it was like to send your 17-year-old son or daughter off to war, knowing so many might be killed and ultimately were. My father told me how those kids lived and died in cold, mud-filled, rat-infested trenches. Many cried openly for their mothers and families as they lay dying in those deplorable conditions. Some were blown to bits so small there was very little to bury. The ones who could be found and pieced together were buried in huge cemeteries in the countries where they died, with no family or friends present.

My father often said he wasn't a hero, even though he had many medals to honor his heroism: "All the true heroes stayed over there." Those heroes were honored here at home with a Cenotaph a monument to someone buried elsewhere. That makes the Shubenacadie Monument just as sacred as any cemetery.

You, the councillors of East Hants, were voted into positions of leadership to represent and make decisions for the betterment of the community as a whole. You were not given the right to push aside, tear down, move, or desecrate a memorial that was purposely placed in the center of the community to honor the sons and daughters who were killed in a foreign country fighting for the freedoms we all enjoy today. They never had a chance to grow up, to have families of their own. They have never needed parking spots to play baseball or to watch their sons and daughters play ball. Why would any councillor or anyone else want to rob these heroes of their sacred place of honor in favor of a parking lot? Where would it stop? Will we push over headstones in one of our cemeteries to provide extra parking?

I'd like to share a bit of personal story to show how those in foreign countries view the sacrifices our young people made. I have had the good fortune to travel to France and Holland a number of times, often with Dutch friends who took me to visit their relatives. When these people discovered, through conversation, that my father had fought there during the war, all attention to others was dropped. Everyone's focus turned to me and what they could do to show their extreme appreciation for the sacrifice Canadian families made to win their freedom from brutal dictators.

I visited monuments and several cemeteries in both France and Holland that hold our fallen Canadian soldiers. They were perfectly manicured, every headstone with flowers and in perfect condition after all these years, the grass looking like a golf course.

My recommendation to move forward:

I am not a parking-lot engineer, but I have designed and built a number of parking lots. The Memorial/Cenotaph must be put back in its sacred spot. I viewed the foundation, which appears with a face lift perfectly stable and secure to support the bronze soldier for another hundred years. After viewing the site and taking measurements, it is obvious that the Cenotaph only takes up two to three parking spots and can be easily worked around to provide ample space for community and business parking.

I have in the past rented land from C.N. for very low rates. With some chain-link fence along the tracks, 50 to 60 parking spots could be created on the upper level an option that appears not to have been considered. The lower level needs fill removed and could generate another 30 to 40 spots if retaining walls were installed. As I said, I'm not an engineer, but there seem to be many options that would avoid moving the Cenotaph. Has anyone held preliminary discussions with an engineer or talked to C.N.?

In closing, I must say I am deeply concerned by the lack of openness and the appearance of mistruths attributed to some councillors. We have all witnessed the mayhem and mistrust caused when leaders are not truthful. Everyone in leadership must uphold honesty and deal with those who do not, as it creates a trust issue for all who are directed by your decisions.

One of my father's favorite sayings, which he often repeated to me as a child, was: "Half the truth is a whole lie." All councillors should hold each other accountable for complete truthfulness.

I urge you to reverse this decision and restore the Shubenacadie Cenotaph to its rightful, original location. Our fallen soldiers, their families need to be treated with dignity and respect.

Sincerely,

Vernon Blois