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Haldimand's political leaders speak on four years of Land Back Lane



by [Mike Renzella](#)

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CALEDONIA—July 19, 2024 marked the four-year anniversary of the occupation of the former McKenzie Meadows site, now dubbed [1492 Land Back Lane](#).

The Press reached out to Haldimand's top political leaders for their thoughts on the anniversary and the continuing impacts of the occupations of both McKenzie Meadows and Douglas Creek Estate on the surrounding community.

Haldimand Norfolk MP Leslyn Lewis submitted the following statement in an email: "It's disheartening to see that four years after the Land Back Lane occupation of the McKenzie Meadows development site began, that no resolution has been achieved. It's not in the best interests of either Six Nations or the surrounding community for this state of tension and conflict to be prolonged. The Haudenosaunee people have the freedom to exercise their land claim negotiation rights and to peacefully protest, but it's also important that the rule of law is upheld and that the occupation comes to a good-faith, peaceful conclusion.



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CALEDONIA—This archival photo was taken at the site of the former McKenzie Meadows development in July 2020. It has now been dubbed 1492 Land Back Lane by the protestors who continue to occupy the site four years later. —Haldimand Press archive photo.

have a duty to listen and to work together towards resolving our differences. I remain hopeful that as the community comes together, we can achieve a lasting solution that allows all who call Caledonia home to grow together and prosper together.”

In an interview with The Press, Haldimand Norfolk MPP Bobbi Ann Brady criticized both the federal and provincial governments for failing to resolve the land claim issues behind at both locations, creating “a lot of frustration” that is felt by everyone in the community.

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“Both Douglas Creek and McKenzie Meadows are constant reminders that there have been tensions in the past, and future tensions can occur at any time. Those disruptions can become a reality at any time,” she said.

She pointed to a recommendation from the Ipperwash inquiry, a 1,553 page report released in 2007 following the shooting death of Indigenous protestor Dudley George at the hands of the OPP at Ipperwash Provincial Park in 1995. The final report included 100 recommended changes to policing, negotiation processes, and Indigenous land rights. Brady specifically pointed to the recommendation of adopting a democratic policing model: “Sadly, it’s a recommendation that has not received much attention. As a result, the Ontario government, by not addressing this, continues to support police independence.”

A democratic policing model is aimed at increasing accountable, transparent policing, which is respectful of human rights and cultural differences, with government oversight.

“I question why the Ontario government conducts inquiries; why do they do reports if they’re not going to look at all of the recommendations or adhere to those recommendations?” asked Brady. “I think we have a government with respect to responding to groups that might threaten public order, I think it seems to be something political leaders are more than happy to leave solely in the hands of the police. That is something that needs to be looked at, we need to change that.”

Brady pledged to press the government and the solicitor general to adopt a model of policing that “better serves everyone.”

She iterated that advocating for switching models is not a statement on the quality of policing done in Haldimand.

“We’ve all witnessed police on the front lines in Caledonia at both occupations,” said Brady. “They have a tough job, because they don’t get to call the decisions.”

Brady said she hears “near and far” from people who feel that the handling of local land claim protests have been “inappropriate and also unacceptable.”

She continued, “We’ve heard about reduced consequences. That doesn’t help the situation, that doesn’t make the public feel good about anything. I think that ensuring that the law is applied equally to everyone is of utmost importance.”

Haldimand Mayor Shelley Ann Bentley noted in an email that the County is “limited” in what can be discussed publicly, with the ongoing occupation still before the courts.

“The County believes that the land occupations in Caledonia are a direct result of the failure of Ontario and Canada to resolve outstanding Indigenous land claims. In 1995, Six Nations sued Ontario and Canada respecting these claims,” said Bentley. “They are still waiting to have the cases heard in court or settled. Even though the issues are extremely complicated, that length of time for a court process is totally unacceptable.”

She said that as both mayor and a private citizen, she has respect for Indigenous communities in Haldimand and elsewhere: “I can certainly appreciate the frustration of the Indigenous community over the provincial and federal government delays.”

Bentley stressed that the County has “no power to resolve the McKenzie Meadows issues, nor does it have the power to resolve the broader claims made in the 1995 case. The power to do both rests with the provincial and federal governments.”

She called the ongoing occupations two-fold.

“First, when each of the land occupations spilled over onto municipal roadways, everyone suffered from the resulting disruption. And this includes not only Caledonia residents, but also our neighbours in surrounding communities, including our Six Nations neighbours. Second, even after the roads were opened, both occupations serve as constant reminders of past and potential future disruptions.”

Bentley concluded, “Even while all of this has been happening, Haldimand continues to build on and enjoy positive relationships with Six Nations and we are committed to working together for future success within the sphere of municipal authority.”



Mike Renzella

After studying journalism at Humber College, Mike Renzella desired to write professionally but found himself working in technical fields for many years. Beginning in 2019 as a freelancer, he joined the team full-time later that year. Since then, Mike has won several awards for his articles thanks to his commitment to presenting an unbiased, honest look at the important news and events shaping our community.

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