

Civil Discourse and Calling a Neighbourhood 'Nowhere'

When I told the LRT Sub-Committee that people living on the line don't like being told they are "nowhere", Councillor Whitehead took it personally and impugned my character.

By Karl Andrus

Yesterday I had an opportunity to speak to the Hamilton LRT Sub-Committee. I made my delegation because I wanted to speak to the history of the debate, the community organizations currently rallying to support businesses on the line, and to the prolific use of the term "nowhere" in the debate and discussion about this infrastructure project.

I had jokingly talked about the previous Rapid Transit debate in Hamilton and the quote from former Mayor Bill Powell, when he called the proposed line from downtown (my neck of the woods) and the mountain "a system from nowhere to nowhere".

I said to the assembled councillors, "My key point, and I really wanted to come back down to it is, especially listening to my neighbours and friends who live in this area, we're just really tired of hearing it called 'nowhere'. You know, regardless of what your stances are on LRT or anywhere else. I don't call your home 'nowhere' so please stop calling mine 'nowhere'."

I was hopeful that this might stir a conversation about the negative tones of language that are creeping into our civic and political discourse on this side of the border, as well as the other side.

I did not specifically mention Ward 8 Councillor Terry Whitehead or anyone else. However, Councillor Whitehead took this concern quite personally.

He went on to impugn my character, saying, "I'm just insulted when people come in and conflate a comment that was literally talking about transit lines and stations and not neighbourhoods, just to shift the discussion and the narrative to something that it's not. And it's unfortunate that people want to do that, because I think that creates more division than being honest about what the discussion's really about."

Mr. Whitehead, I intended no personal affront. If I can take a page from your book, I was merely speaking to the dictionary use of the word "nowhere", which as I am sure you know reads:

adverb: nowhere

1. not in or to any place; not anywhere.

"plants and animals found nowhere else in the world"

pronoun

1. no place.

"there was nowhere for her to sit"

2. a place that is remote, uninteresting, or nondescript.

"a stretch of road between nowhere and nowhere"

adjective: nowhere

1. having no prospect of progress or success.

"she's involved in a nowhere affair with a married executive"

There is no reference to nowhere as a *transit hub*, as a *destination hub* or as a consideration in the LRT debate.

Please do not take my comments personally but rather as an attempt to keep a discussion about civic matters, well, *civil*. No one needs to feel like they are from "nowhere".

I agree wholeheartedly with you that the Queenston traffic Circle is not currently a transit hub or the ideal end for LRT. However, there are plans to turn it into one, and eventually to extend the line to Eastgate Square.

In the meantime, people still live there, work there and it continues to *not* be nowhere. So stop using derisive and dismissive language and mean what you say.

Thanks to Joey Coleman, you can watch a video of the exchange:

- <https://www.facebook.com/JoeyColeman.ca/videos/10155379895996111/>