

QUESNEL COUNCILLOR CENSURED....AGAIN

By 250 News

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Quesnel, B.C. - For the second time in less than a year, the Council for the City of Quesnel has passed a motion of censure against Councillor Sushil Thapar.

A motion of censure is a formal statement that Council is reprimanding one of its members for conduct they feel has violated the Community Charter.

At its meeting this week, Quesnel City Council passed a motion of censure regarding improper disclosure by Coun. Sushil Thapar. Council passed the motion based on Coun. Thapar's release of confidential information discussed during duly called and closed-to-the-public meetings.

The motion reads:

WHEREAS members of council have a legal duty to maintain confidentiality;

AND WHEREAS improper disclosure of confidential information, particularly involving personal information, may expose the City to liability;

AND WHEREAS Councilor Thapar has disclosed to the media confidential information in clear breach of confidentiality rules and a specific agreement;

NOW THEREFORE COUNCIL censures Councilor Thapar for his failure to comply with the Community Charter with respect to rules of confidentiality related to closed Council meeting matters.

Council cited several sections of the Community Charter that were of concern, most notably: Section 90, which outlines what issues municipalities may or must discuss in-camera, issues mostly related to labour, land or legal.

Last June, Quesnel Council passed a motion of censure against Thapar following a series of events and comments which negatively impacted a number of City of Quesnel employees.

Steve Forseth

MONDAY, 4 JULY, 2011

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On April 18th – In a report authored by Quesnel Mayor Mary Sjostrom – Quesnel City Council passed a “Motion of Censure” against Quesnel City Councillor Sushil Thapar for a series of events/comments against Quesnel City Staff where they could not easily respond to statements from a member of Quesnel City Council and were in a vulnerable position. See Mayor Sjostrom’s report to Council, dated June 27th, [here](#)

During the week of June 20-24 – both Quesnel City Councillor Sushil Thapar and CRD Area ‘C’ resident Arthur Topham made both oral (Quesnel Councillor Thapar on June 24th) and written (Mr. Topham on June 20th) comments about the Quesnel City Manager (J. Stecyk) on his former job, his hiring as Quesnel’s City Manager, the firm that helped in the process to hire a new Quesnel City Manager and his professional capacity to act as Quesnel’s City Manager.

On June 27th – Quesnel City Manager John Stecyk came forward with a memorandum (see that [here](#)), authored by himself and cleared by the City of Quesnel Solicitor (Lawyer), requesting that Quesnel Council require Councillor Thapar to retract his oral comments of the previous week and apologize formally to the Quesnel City Manager for his slanderous comments about his previous job and his ability to act and also to criticize the firm that assisted the City of Quesnel in hiring a new Quesnel City Manager, contrary to City of Quesnel Policy. Mr. Topham has also been presented with a formal request, from Quesnel’s Municipal Lawyer, to retract/apologize for his written letter as printed in the June 22nd edition of the Quesnel Cariboo Observer

Quesnel Council then had an opportunity to ask appropriate questions to the Quesnel City Manager on his memo. Councillor Thapar denounced this item coming forward on the June 27th Quesnel Council Agenda however Quesnel Mayor Mary Sjostrom responded by stating that Quesnel Council, as a body, approved the Special Meeting Agenda.

Quesnel Council did not make a formal decision on Mr. Stecyk’s request but agreed to refer further discussion on this matter In-Camera and as of July 4th – that is where it remains. Councillor Thapar did, however, make oral comments on local radio (June 28/29th) advising that he does not plan to apologize for his comments, as they relate to John Stecyk and his hiring as Quesnel’s City Manager


Conclusion:

A motion of censure is a municipal council’s most powerful tool (and one of very few tools available to them) to formally express its’ disappointment in the conduct of one of its’ own members. One does not get up and say “Let’s pass a censure motion today”. This act is only done when all other attempts to rein in the act of a member of a municipal council do not work.

As Quesnel Mayor Mary Sjostrom noted at the June 27th Special Quesnel Council Meeting, you simply cannot have members of a municipal council investigating each other, there are ways to address concerns relating to their spending without it turning into a “witchhunt” and she also stated that any form of harassment against Quesnel City Staff will not tolerated and could see financial costs coming against the City of Quesnel. See these comments, as stated, in the June 27th Special Quesnel Council Meeting Minutes [here](#) and go to Pages 3-4 of the Minutes for proof

At this point – it appears that there is a standoff between Quesnel City Councillor Sushil Thapar & the rest of his Quesnel Council colleagues and we’ll have to wait and see what happens but it is fair to suggest that Councillor Thapar is playing a very dangerous game here – especially if his end goal is to run for Quesnel Mayor. There are non-confrontational ways to express his differences between himself and the current Quesnel Mayor without involving Quesnel City Staff and engaging in mudslinging. Also – there are effective and diplomatic ways to express your concerns with your colleagues’ spending without it looking childish in the media. Such methods include phoning or meeting the member in question one on one and expressing your concerns to them and leave the disagreements there and not expressing them in the media

Let us leave the political debating to Quesnel City Council members’ and leave Quesnel City Staff out of it.

Posted by [Steve Forseth](#) at 12:00 AM 

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MEETING NO. 17

A special meeting of the Municipal Council of the City of Quesnel was held on the 27th day of June, 2011 commencing at 7:47 p.m. in the City Hall Council Chambers. A Delegation/Committee of Whole Council meeting was recessed and Council moved into a special meeting.

PRESENT:

Mayor Mary Sjostrom, Chair, and Councillors Peter Couldwell, Coralee Oakes, Ron Paull, Laurey-Anne Roodenburg, and Sushil Thapar.

Staff members in attendance: City Manager John Stecyk, Director of Finance Kari Bolton, Acting Director of Public Works & Engineering Ken Coombs, Communications Supervisor Matt Wood, General Manager Community Services Jeff Norburn, City Planner Tanya Turner, and Deputy Corporate Administrator Lori Scott.

There were two media representatives in attendance and six members were present in the public gallery for portions of the meeting.

CARRIED

City Manager Stecyk's response to recent media incidents

Mayor Sjostrom referred to a late agenda item and stated that City Manager Stecyk would read a statement in response to recent media incidents.

City Manager Stecyk read a memorandum prepared by him and dated June 27, 2011 concerning recent media incidents involving a letter to the editor of the Cariboo Observer from a CRD resident and statements made by Councillor Thapar which were widely broadcast on local radio. City Manager Stecyk stated that the City Solicitor viewed the comments as being made in a defamatory manner in reference to the City Manager's hiring, work history and professional competence. The incidents contained several examples of defamation and, in the case of the CRD resident, a letter was sent by the City Solicitor requesting a retraction and apology. The City Manager's memorandum put forward a request that City Council require a retraction and apology from Councillor Thapar.

City Manager Stecyk stated that Councillor Thapar made defamatory statements against the City Manager, breached City policy regarding harassment, contravened City rules on the issue of Human Resource matters regarding confidentiality, and contravened the intent and spirit of Council's motion of censure against Councillor Thapar regarding treatment of staff, and harassment, in particular where threats against employees regarding their employment status is concerned. City Manager Stecyk submitted that Councillor Thapar has put the City at legal risk and has damaged the City's reputation.

City Manager Stecyk's response to recent media incidents (cont'd.)

City Manager Stecyk stated that his Yukon employment history was fully disclosed before, during, and after the interview process, asked questions which Mr. Stecyk answered, was present when questions were answered regarding the Yukon employment history and was free to ask any questions about Mr. Stecyk's Yukon experience, if he so wished.

In conclusion, City Manager Stecyk stated the contents of his memorandum had been screened by the City's solicitor as were the clips and transcripts of the noted radio broadcasts.

Mayor Sjostrom called for questions from Council.

Councillor Thapar stated his objection to the late item being added without providing advance notice, and further stated his public rejection of the item being placed on the agenda. Mayor Sjostrom responded that the items were put forward as recommended by the Executive Committee of Council and that the resolution to add late items to the agenda were voted on at the pleasure of Council. Mayor Sjostrom stated that Councillor Thapar had chosen to discuss matters in the media without advance notice and that the City Manager was being provided an opportunity to respond.

Discussion ensued with Councillor Thapar becoming angry, Councillor Roodenburg called for a point of order, and Mayor Sjostrom used the gavel twice to call Councillor Thapar to order. Councillor Thapar stated that he has the transcript of the entire radio broadcast and again stated his public rejection of the item being discussed.

Councillor Oakes noted the inaccurate statements made by Councillor Thapar in the media. In particular, Councillor Oakes noted the cost of the hiring process for the position of City Manager was stated by Councillor Thapar to be \$25,000, which was not correct. She stated that these inaccuracies put the corporation at liability. Council members were present in the same interview room and had all received the same information during the interview process. Councillor Thapar stated that \$25,000 was budgeted for the hiring process and he has tried to find out how much was spent to hire Jim Craven's firm. He asked the Mayor to announce how much was spent. Mayor Sjostrom reported that \$14,725 was spent. Councillor Roodenburg questioned why, as Finance Chair, was Councillor Thapar constantly asking for numbers and reporting incorrect figures. She asked what the purpose was for continuing the lengthy harassment of Mayor, Council and City staff, who are trying to run the City. Councillor Thapar stated that he has asked for information and has been provided duplicated and inaccurate responses. He was not harassing, just trying to get answers and that the City Manager could go ahead and make his emails public. Mayor Sjostrom stated that no one was hiding information. She noted that the cheque to Mr. Craven's firm was already listed in the agenda cheque listings. She asked Councillor Thapar that as Finance Chair, why he did not know this.

Councillor Oakes asked City Manager Stecyk how many communiqués had been received throughout the process. City Manager Stecyk stated that there were 800 received at last count from Councillor Thapar, and 150 was the next highest number of requests received from an individual Council member. The numbers refer to the all-inclusive count of email transactions generated as a result of an initial request and that the counts are done automatically by the email system.

Motion of Censure of a Council Member

Mayor Sjostrom read a memorandum which she prepared following the meeting of the Executive Committee of Council on June 27, 2011. The memorandum stated that on April 18, 2011 Council passed a motion to censure Councillor Thapar as a result of a series of events and comments that he had made that had negatively affected a number of City employees. Those employees were in a vulnerable position as they cannot easily respond to such statements from a member of Council and Council felt that it was important to take a stand on the issue. The motion of censure is a formal statement of disapproval that Council is reprimanding one of its members for conduct that it feels is unacceptable.

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Motion of Censure of a Council Member (cont'd.)

Mayor Sjostrom stated that the decision to pass a motion of censure against a Council member was made with great regret and much discussion and was not taken lightly. She strongly stated that such behaviour against employees will not be tolerated as there is a harassment policy in place and it could result in financial costs to the corporation. Mayor Sjostrom commented that there are few tools available to Council under the *Community Charter*. The motion of censure was formally endorsed by Council and was now being made public. She stated that members of Council investigating other members was unacceptable. Mayor Sjostrom advised that Council will move discussion into a closed meeting and called for a motion to adjourn and move to an in camera meeting.

ADJOURNMENT:

11-17-245 MOVED Councillor Couldwell, Seconded Councillor Roodenburg and resolved: THAT the special Council meeting for June 27, 2011 be adjourned at 8:37 p.m. and moves to a closed meeting.

CARRIED

Certified correct



CITY OF QUESNEL
MEMORANDUM

LATE ITEM F 1(b)

TO: Quesnel City Council
FROM: Mayor Mary Sjostrom
DATE: June 27, 2011
FOR MEETING DATE OF: June 27, 2011
SUBJECT: Motion of Censure of a Council Member

On April 18, 2011 City Council passed a motion to censure Councilor Thapar arising out of a series of events and comments that he had made that had negatively affected a number of City employees.

Those employees were in a vulnerable position as they cannot easily respond to such statements from a member of Council and so, Council felt that it was important to take a stand on this issue.

The motion of censure is a formal statement that Council is reprimanding one of its members for conduct that it feels is unacceptable.

City of Quesnel

Mary Sjostrom,
Mayor