

B.C. mayor censured for 'unacceptable' conduct

Skakun escapes censure and sanctions

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Agreeing it's time to put the issue behind them, city councillors backed away Friday from both censuring and sanctioning Coun. Brian Skakun for leaking confidential information to the media.

The move was made during a noon hour meeting after Skakun delivered an apology for his actions.

"I don't think there is a day in the past three years that I haven't thought about how I could've done something different," Skakun said as he read a brief statement.

Council colleagues, in turn, endorsed a statement of their own stating, in part, that while they were disappointed with Skakun they also acknowledged Skakun endured a lengthy legal process as a result.

Had council not taken the issue to the courts, the city could have been liable for up to \$500,000 in penalties, it was noted in the statement.

Skakun left the chamber after reading his apology and the five other councillors who attended the meeting outlined their reasons for deciding to bring the matter to a close.

Coun. Murry Krause said the issue has been "very divisive" and there are more important matters to pursue.

"I, right from the beginning, believe that Coun. Skakun probably did these things for what he thought was right," Krause said. "Unfortunately, it didn't turn out the way."

Coun. Dave Wilbur, a lawyer by profession, said he initially voted for censure because he thought the risk of a repeat offence would be real and the city had already suffered losses to its reputation as being trustworthy.

But Wilbur said he now believes Skakun is now willing to use the formal tools available to advance his concerns on such issues and has suffered enough.

"He has paid a price and as a lawyer who has dealt with criminal and civil litigation, I've seen those that are embroiled in it, whether they are successful or not, they begin to live the litigation and, as he said, on a daily basis, going over what could have been done differently.

"I think that's a heavy load that he's carried over the past three years."

Coun. Cameron Stolz said Skakun also recognizes that council and staff have also paid prices and stressed that staff's involvement in the court proceedings and the censure issue was strictly on council's instructions.

"Administration acted in good faith, city council tried to act in good faith and this all began because councillor Skakun believed he was acting in good faith," Stolz said.

"The reason why I stress that is it's very important that we realize moving forward that there are decisions that were made that were not the best choice at the time.

"But there was no way anyone did anything malicious here. There was no witch hunt. It was just due diligence."

Coun. Garth Frizzell echoed Stolz's comments and added Skakun "showed remorse."

"When he apologized to the people of Prince George for what he did, that changed things," Frizzell said.

Coun. Shari Green said it was simply time to conclude the matter with a new council to be elected in the next few weeks and hearing Skakun's apology helped make her decision.

"It will be a team moving forward and not dealing with what's happened in the past," Green said of the next council.

Mayor Dan Rogers and councillors Debora Munoz and Don Bassermann, all who testified during Skakun's trial in which he was found guilty of violating provincial privacy legislation, did not attend the meeting. However, Frizzell indicated Rogers went over the statement in advance of the meeting.

SKAKUN REACTS

Councillor Brian Skakun expressed relief Friday at city council's decision not to proceed with censure and sanctions after he was found guilty of breaking provincial privacy legislation by leaking confidential information to a local media outlet.

Skakun also said that if he had a chance to do it all over again, there is "no doubt" he would've done things differently.

"I would've done everything I could internally to try and get the information out," Skakun said in an interview.

"I also would have had council on board if I could have to bring the information out."

Skakun has admitted he never directly urged council to pass a motion to make public the information - a labour lawyer's report on the conduct of a city manager at the Prince George RCMP detachment - opting instead to give the document to CBC Radio.

The station posted the document on its website for a brief period on Aug. 19, 2008. Slightly less than a year later, a charge was laid against Skakun and on May 24, he was fined \$750 in Prince George provincial court following a lengthy trial.

Skakun said Friday a "mechanism" needs to be put in place to better enable an elected official to make such information public when he or she believes it's in the public interest without being penalized.

"How that happens, I don't know," Skakun said.

But he expects it will be an issue the next council will pursue after it's elected on Nov. 19.

"It could take awhile," he said "I mean, change starts slowly but I think...things can change."

A censure is an expression of disapproval by council of a colleague's actions. And had council followed up with sanctions, Skakun could have been prohibited from being the acting mayor, chairing the committee of the whole, sitting on any council committees, municipal commission and boards in the city's name, and from traveling to out-of-town local government events.

He also could have been ordered to apologize to all parties affected, something Skakun did in chambers Friday prior to council's decision.

Skakun said he will continue to pursue an appeal of the fine.

"My case could have had implications for elected officials across the country, it could set a huge, huge precedent," Skakun said.

The original court case cost Skakun about \$30,000, about half of which was covered by donations. He has said lawyer Jon Duncan is representing him without cost on the appeal and did so on the recent hearing in Prince George provincial court on the censure.

The city has never provided a figure for how much it has spent on legal fees, although Mayor Dan Rogers has said it has been in the "tens of thousands."

SKAKUN'S APOLOGY

Coun. Brian Skakun gave the following statement in city council chambers on Friday:

"I just want start by saying thanks to acting mayor Shari Green and council for having the willingness to bring this issue to a closure today and we have some common ground on that.

And I also want to say that I apologize to council for what happened three years ago, and to Mr. Bates [city manager Derek Bates] and administration.

And I don't think there has been a day in the past three years that I haven't thought about how I could've done something different. It's been an incredibly tough three years and I do take my job and elected officials seriously and though I did what I did because of what happened to the victims of the harassment and I felt empathy for them and I also felt that this information needed to be public and I really think that there needs to be something, a better mechanism in place, if something like this ever happens again, although I don't think it would, that there would be an avenue for elected officials working with others to try and get the information out.

And I feel the same as many others that this issue does need to come to a resolution. Not only is there is an election going on, there are much more important issues in Prince George that we can deal with."

COUNCIL'S OFFICIAL STATEMENT

City council endorsed the following statement on the Brian Skakun matter:

"Councillor Skakun was convicted in Provincial Court under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FOIP) in R. vs. Skakun, due to the unauthorized release, by him, of personal information in the custody of the City. City Council is disappointed that Councillor Skakun made this choice.

The FOIP Act imposes legal duties upon corporations that are in care of personal information, and prescribes financial penalties for contravention of those duties. The City's potential penalty could have been up to \$500,000 and as a result, City Council had a responsibility to act and it did. It must be completely clear that City Council instructed its Mayor and Administration to cause investigation into the matter. The RCMP North District conducted an independent investigation and recommended charges to Crown Counsel.

City Council regrets that personal information was unlawfully released by Councillor Skakun. We acknowledge that Councillor Skakun has endured a lengthy legal process as a result. We also acknowledge the difficult work of the Administrative staff and their professionalism throughout this matter.

With the issuance of this statement, City Council concludes City business concerning this matter."

[CBC News](#)

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[DOCUMENT: Fort St. John city council motion on Mayor Bruce Lantz \(PDF\)](#)

The city council in Fort St. John, B.C., has censured the community's mayor for allegedly "unacceptable" conduct and demands that he not be left alone with any female member of the city's staff.

In a Feb. 28 closed meeting, city councillors voted unanimously for a resolution against Mayor Bruce Lantz, citing complaints about Lantz's conduct "at events in which he is representing the City."

The resolution did not spell out any details of the alleged complaints.

It says councillors "considered the complaints and the response of the Mayor" and then resolved to prohibit him from meeting alone with — or travelling alone with — any female city employee.

They also want to prohibit Lantz from travelling outside the region on city business without prior council approval and only if he's accompanied by another councillor.

The motion specifies that several of the mayor's appointments on different boards would be terminated.

The motion is on the agenda for the next council meeting March 14.

The sanctions would go into effect March 15, the motion says.

Lantz has not responded to interview requests about the motion and did not attend the Feb. 28 meeting

Mayor's request to lift censure denied

Comments Mayor's request to lift censure denied

April 29, 2011

Ryan Lux

Staff Writer

Fort St. John city council sent a message to Mayor Bruce Lantz Tuesday that his censure was more than just a time out.

At the end of a lengthy meeting, Lantz tabled a motion seeking council's permission to attend an upcoming North Central Local Government Association meeting unchaperoned. Council rejected the request on the grounds that his censure was still in effect.

After the first request was denied Lantz made another motion, seeking to travel to the annual Union of British Columbian Municipalities unattended, which led to a frustrated exchange.

"It's not like this is about babysitting, you've made your point, now lets move on," Lantz told council.

Councillor Trevor Bolin suggested tabling the motion until councillors Dan Davies and Lori Ackerman, who were absent from the meeting, were present. Bolin said he would feel more comfortable if council made the decision unanimously.

Lantz argued that enough councillors were present to form a quorum, which meant there was nothing stopping it from approving his motion.

“There were enough people here to make decisions for Fort St. John all night long. I don’t see why you can’t make a decision about me,” Lantz argued, “Are you worried about me not staying sober?”

In response Bolin suggested waiting to the May 9th meeting to make a decision, in order for council to properly weigh its options.

“We spent a lot of time coming to this decision and I feel like we should have some time to think about it,” said Bolin.

“You spent nine months considering your lofty ideas, you would think that would be long enough,” retorted Lantz.

“And yet we’re still discussing it,” said Bolin.

Lantz argued that council must make the decision immediately given the conference was scheduled for May 11th and he needed to let Prince George Mayor, Dan Rogers, know whether or not he would be there to assist with a presentation on the transportation conference Lantz organized earlier in the year.

Councillor Bruce Christensen pointed out that he had spoken with Rogers, and as far as he knew, the Prince George mayor planned to give the presentation alone.

The other three members present agreed with Bolin that Lantz’s motion should be tabled to give council time to think about it and to allow the two absent councillors have input.

Visibly perturbed, Lantz withdrew his motion when it became obvious that it would be defeated by council, stating that the situation was “all too predictable