

Concerning times at Town Hall

By Todd Taylor

All of Orangeville should know that there is something very strange and concerning happening within our fine town hall.

The integrity commissioner is actively investigating the allegedly inappropriate behavior of one of our elected representatives. I think we all now know that bullying, intimidation, and any other abusive behavior is simply unacceptable in the workplace or other situations. It is especially disheartening when our community leaders are accused of impropriety and even worse if they are found to be guilty.

The investigation is focused on a member of council who is alleged to have interfered with or unduly influenced municipal staff in the performance of their duties, as well as breaching a duty to treat members of staff appropriately and without abuse, bullying, or intimidation.

Although I am quite curious, I will not make any references to either who made the complaint or who is being investigated. Nor will I openly wonder about who the protagonists in this sad chapter could possibly be. In At this point, we simply need to allow the integrity commissioner to complete his investigation and recommend what type of penalty will be imposed if the individual is found to be guilty of the charges.

The unfortunate piece of this story that everyone in town should understand is that the member of council who is being accused of the behavior has also not been cooperating with the investigation. In fact, the council member advised the integrity commissioner that the investigation should be suspended.

It is perplexing that an individual council member would offer such direction to the integrity commissioner. The commissioner, Ottawa lawyer Guy Giorno, pointed out in his report to council the oddity of the situation by stating, "It is not appropriate for me to take direction from an individual council member. This is particularly true when the council member who is advising me on how to handle an investigation is the very subject of the investigation."

It is important that none of us miss this piece of the story.

I do not know who the member of municipal staff is who brought forth the complaint. Even if I did, I would not be able to share the name in the paper. All items that are sent to the integrity commissioner must be treated with utmost confidentiality until a resolution is realized.

I would however, like to send a note to that individual town employee through my column.

My message is one of admiration. I imagine it took a great deal of courage to share with others that your work environment was less than ideal. I imagine there would be a period of self-doubt and anxiety while coming to a decision to report the behavior. As the iconic Gord Downie stated, "Courage, it couldn't come at a worse time". You should know that myself and a vast majority of others will unequivocally support you if the charges made are found to be true.

At the same time, I do feel sorry for council. Yes, we could do some critical thinking and arrive at a short list of who might be the elected official in question. Why bother? The truth is that we do not know.

The unfortunate part for all seven of our elected officials is that this exercise, albeit for a short time, cast doubt over the way in which they are all conducting themselves. All of council is painted with the same negative brush while the public waits to learn of the integrity commissioner's findings. Unfair, but reality.

I imagine those long-term councillors with strong reputations are deeply saddened by this. In politics, people fully understand what contributions are personally made to the greater good, yet once an individual is shown to be something different their career is sullied for life. Perhaps you disagree with my assertion? I ask then, what do you first think of when I say Bill Clinton, Richard Nixon, or Rob Ford? I rest my case.

In my last column, I spoke of the need to maintain our connection with Mr. Giorno as integrity commissioner. Now, two weeks later, it is even more crucial that Orangeville has this process in place. As I read Mr. Giorno's report on this matter, it has become abundantly clear to me that he is indeed a principled professional. At one point he states that if he did not follow through on the investigation he would "be derelict in my responsibilities." As a citizen of our town, I am confident we have a competent, dedicated professional leading this process.

If the allegations are proven to be true, I think all of us will agree that there is no place for this type of behavior in Orangeville.

In the meantime, I wholeheartedly wish Mr. Giorno, Orangeville council, and the Orangeville staff a speedy and fair resolution to this unfortunate chapter.

The rest of us will be actively watching and waiting to ensure we move forward together in a positive fashion.