

RECEIVED VIA EMAIL – November 28, 2016
 Re: TBM Workplace Violence and Harassment Program

Members of Committee of the Whole

Much care and effort has gone into constructing the document before us. It is no small task to dot all the "i"s and cross all the "t"s to guide us all in minding our Ps and Qs in our dealings with each other.

It matters how we treat each other, how we converse. My conversation with Ms Moreau, when we went over this document together, was meaningful. I felt kindly and openly received, my ideas warmly responded to, rather than being defensively fended off.

As Ms Moreau affirmed, the policy is mostly common sense.
 But how can we legislate uncommon sensitivity? Or all those times when we mis-speak, or mis-hear? Or the differentials of power--real or perceived?

For example, if a woman my size is in a small room with a large man, and he raises his voice, could that warrant a complaint?

An appendix, clarifying such examples, would be useful. More focus on prevention and amelioration would help too. Mediation has been suggested by the public and Council. Perhaps lawyers need not be our first line of consultation.

But what if the dissent is not between individuals, but between groups? What if the public, rightly or wrongly, feels disrespected by officials?

Can we build into this document a process through which a town in crisis finds a way to communicate and begin a healing process?

Face-to-face is, in my book, more effective than FaceBook. In the November 7th workshop on communication, Karen Gordon underlined this: "Pick up the phone: talk with your constituents," she urged. "Be as transparent as possible." But instead we have been scolded like naughty children for "pestering the people in charge", to quote one council member.

Instead of transparency, after the trauma of Black Tuesday last March 8th--and it still feels like yesterday--the Blue Mountain Wall of Silence was erected. If the Depot was the Town's "white elephant", the Library is now "the elephant in the room". Everyone knows about it but no one wants to talk about it. Hundreds of letters and pleas from the public have received no response. Surely it is common courtesy to at least acknowledge receipt of a letter, never mind addressing its concerns. Rather, we are instructed to "get over it." And so it festers....

Silence breeds mistrust and suspicion. Trust me, trust is badly broken in this town. And attempts to silence dissenting voices infringe upon Human Rights.

So the document before us has been greeted by many members of the public with suspicion. A Red Flag document, we might say.

And yet the policy is primarily for the purpose of protecting staff in the workplace. And the townspeople care deeply about that. Our compassion for staff, ironically, is the basis of the crisis in which we're embroiled. Town staff is stressed too. Everyone is hurting.

Another issue is a lack of transparency and deals done behind closed doors with no public input. To his credit, Michael Benner includes Goal 2 of our Strategic Plan in all his Staff Reports: "Engage our community and partners." My bias, if you will, is that Council should be proactive in this. The politicians shouldn't wait for the people to come to them--they should go to the people.

Real democracy can be messy, passionate and difficult. Are we up for it? Can we mind our manners and engage in civil debate and discussion? Can the document before us provide an opening?

We need a forum for engagement and open discussion. Karen Gordon with her communication skills would be an excellent facilitator. Dare I suggest an organizing committee with representatives from all concerned parties?

And let us hold these gatherings in our democratic public space, the central living room of the town. We know the address by heart.

Respectfully submitted,
 Rosemary Gosselin