

Decorum backlash

Wednesday, April 30/08

Issues of decorum and respect, or the lack of it, were discussed by Councillors at Monday's General Purpose and Administration Committee (GP&A) meeting.

At last Monday's council meeting, Mayor Jim Abernethy asked three individuals to retract statements which they had made in their presentations to Council.

One of these individuals was Jim Richards, who was addressing council on an incident that occurred at the Joint Waste Management Committee meeting held the previous Wednesday. According to Richards, a young Bowmanville mother, who addressed the Committee with her concerns regarding the effects of incineration on human health, was brought to tears following a line of questioning by Regional Chairman Roger Anderson.

"Our unelected Regional Chair saw fit to question this woman, who admitted this was her first presentation and that she was nervous, in his usual condescending, arrogant manner," stated Richards in his address to Council. "Chair Anderson finally succeeded in bringing this woman to tears," he said. "Long time council watchers have learned to expect this kind of treatment from a bully," Richards said, at which point the Mayor cut him off and said he was "out of line". When Richards refused to apologize for calling the Chair a bully, the Mayor asked him to sit down.

At Monday's GP&A meeting, after calling the [Regional] Chair a bully, the Mayor asked him to sit down.

"A number of us present at the Joint Waste Management Committee meeting were appalled at the aggressive manner which we perceived Anderson to be addressing a delegate," said Gasser on Monday. "Many present [at the Joint Waste Management meeting] including myself, were disturbed that Chair Trim did not call Mr. Anderson out of order, or at least caution him," Gasser stated. While the term "bully" is not a compliment, it does properly describe the Chairman's disrespectful behaviour, according to Gasser. Richards did not directly say Anderson was a bully, according to Gasser, "And even if he did, those words are part of the political lexicon," she said. This is real life; this is not a tea party," Gasser stated in response to a question from councillor Adrian Foster regarding the level of respect and decorum in the council chambers. "The Mayor tried to shut me down last year when I said I don't believe in fairy tales and santa clause," Gasser stated. "That was not disrespectful, he [the mayor] just didn't like it."

Mr. Barry Bracken was also cautioned by Mayor Abernethy at last week's meeting, and he too finally sat down without completing his address to council. He referred to Chair Anderson as a "cronie" and said the Regional councillors "follow him like sheep." He retracted both statements when asked to by the Mayor, then continued his presentation by saying "I guess you might not like what I have to say next." At which point the Mayor told him his delegation was over, and Bracken took his seat. "How can the Mayor prevent anyone from speaking on the basis that he might not like what a delegation might say?" Gasser asked on Monday.

"Do you want to let the Mayor be the word police?" she she stated. . "to shut down any and every word from every speaker that is not to his liking?"

When Councillor Willie Woo asked Gasser if she believed a level of decorum had to be returned to the council chambers, Gasser replied that decorum works two ways, including

council treating individuals with respect. "I can disagree with some one without being disrespectful," she stated.

Councillor Ron Hooper stated that from his personal observation, he felt that decorum in the council chambers had deteriorated over the past couple of months, which he felt was due to the heated debate around the EFW.

Councillor Robinson who attended the Joint Waste Management meeting where Anderson had questioned the Bowmanville mother, said he did not find Anderson's comments to be abusive. "It think it was more her inexperience and she was emotional," he said. "I've been to other meetings where Anderson was more aggressive than he was that day," Robinson said.

Councillor Mary Novak attended the same Joint Waste meeting and she said she didn't even know the young lady was crying. Mayor Abernethy stated his impression was that the young lady was was nervous and passionate about her concerns and this is what led to her expressing herself the way she did. Council members have an obligation to question individuals who make delegations, to present information that is factual, according to the Mayor. "We can not simply allow individuals to come in and make representation, and go unchallenged," he sated.

Councillor Trim, said he didn't feel Chair Anderson was out of line and he had not received any such comments from any York or Durham councillor or from the members of the public who sit on the Joint Waste Management Committee.

According to Councillor Trim, he followed the proper procedure at the Joint Waste meeting which he chaired, and he would read the expert from the minutes were Anderson's questions, and the responses made to these questions by the woman were recorded, later in the meeting. Gasser responded that it was as much Anderson's tone as the expressed questions, that were upsetting.