

August 13, 2019

Common Council  
City of Saint John  
8<sup>th</sup> Floor City Hall  
15 Market Square  
Saint John, NB  
E2L 1E8

**Re: Request for adoption of a motion of censure against Mayor Don Darling**

On July 8, 2019, Saint John Common Council unanimously adopted a Code of Conduct for Elected Representatives. Subsequently, I was informed by the Minister of Local Government that this body has a responsibility to “police itself”, when it comes to the behaviour of the Mayor and individual councillors.

Censure is a common law concept that may be used by a local government body that wishes to distance itself from an elected official due to that official’s unacceptable conduct (e.g. bullying; rude comments; disrespectful behaviour). Therefore, I am requesting that Common Council adopt a motion of censure against Mayor Don Darling for his recent deplorable and unacceptable conduct on social media, which represents an unmitigated violation of Article 8.7 of the Code of Conduct, which states that, “Members of Council shall not engage in or encourage bullying, flaming, or shaming of any other social media users. These types of interactions on social media misplace the focus of interaction on attacking individuals rather than engaging in constructive discussion or debate. This manner of communication is inconsistent with the Code of Conduct and **unbecoming of the office that members hold.**”

Mayor Darling sparked an inflammatory exchange on his ‘personal’ Facebook page (his primary means of communication with citizens on matters of public policy) on July 30, 2019, after the earlier submission of a respectful letter to Common Council from the Saint John Citizens Coalition, which asked for a review of the Mayor’s involvement with GrowSJ, due to concerns that his personal political initiative might mislead citizens into believing that his comments, public events etc., reflected the views of Council and even the corporation of the City of Saint John.

Rather than wait for the City Manager to review the matter and report back to Council as instructed, Mr. Darling chose to pre-empt the process and respond publicly on his Facebook page. His preamble served to incite his social media power base against the Saint John Citizens Coalition and the signee of the letter, Mr. Randall Goodwin. Here is but a brief sample of the disgusting exchange that ensued:

Linnae Olmstead: “Randall Goodwin is **an idiot**. I had to block him during the Jellybean Houses discussion because he was **irrational, aggressive**, and quite frankly, **barely literate!** No way he wrote that letter himself, because his spelling and grammar skills are negligible. Carry on as you

are, Mayor- pay no heed to **this quack!!**”

Daryl F: “I remember **this tool** back in the old YMCA days he was a [REDACTED] with a big mouth back then and **a bully** who shot off his mouth until someone put him in his place.”

Julie Garnett: “OMG, that guy really is a **nut job!!**”

Rosey Goodman: “**Small minded twits...**”

Eric Robichaud: “He’s a piece of work. **I’d gladly slap his teeth down his throat.**”

Threats of physical violence are repugnant enough, but when the Mayor allows them to be communicated in a social media environment over which he has full control, one must question not only his personal values, but also his judgement. These and other posts of a similar nature, (I have attached a screenshot of the entire Facebook exchange for the public record), cast a long, dark shadow across our city, and the Mayor’s willingness to publish and disseminate such comments is a black mark on Saint John’s reputation as a welcoming and inclusive community.

Because Mr. Darling himself was monitoring the posts in real-time and administers the Facebook page himself, he is 100 per cent responsible for ensuring that any such exchange on social media adheres to the standards of common decency, let alone the Code of Conduct for Elected Representatives. Whether he choreographed the stage show within the confines of City Hall or not, he has left the public with the distinct impression that the Mayor of Saint John approves of the hateful comments that were published and shared widely across social media, with no apparent concern for their impact on an identifiable group and its members, the community at large, the office of Mayor or the reputation of the City of Saint John. Indeed, he began the exchange with the words “As your Mayor...”. What could be clearer than that?

Furthermore, while allowing the comments to be posted and to remain posted on his Facebook page despite their vile nature, the Mayor has blocked Mr. Goodwin, myself and others from engaging with him or responding to others on the same platform to help them better understand the role of citizens in a democracy. Indeed, during the exchange, while allowing dozens of scurrilous comments to be posted, Mr. Darling attacked and then banned the one person who was defending Mr. Goodwin, serving at that point to further inflame an already explosive social media drama that he himself had set in motion, “as your Mayor”.

Consequently, we are restricted from fully defending ourselves from the many personal attacks from Mr. Darling and his fan club that appear on the Mayor’s primary venue for engagement with citizens on matters of public interest. This, despite the Mayor’s oft repeated claim that he values diversity of opinion. His censorship is not only unfair; it is repugnant. Thus, this letter, in this forum.

When he was compelled to remove the city’s corporate logo from the GrowSJ Facebook page and website, the Mayor plead ignorance of trademark legislation, which is hardly worthy of

comment given his background in sales and marketing. Given that concerns over the incitement of hatred on the Internet, and on Facebook in particular, have received national and international attention in recent months, Mayor Darling can no longer use ignorance as an excuse. He has repeatedly stated that he has remained true to his values since the day he was elected. We now have a much better idea of what those values are, do we not?

Should you agree with the values exhibited in the hateful exchange on the Mayor's Facebook page, then do nothing. Right-thinking voters will judge you accordingly. However, given that Common Council unanimously approved the Code of Conduct for Elected Representatives, I expect all members will want to hold the Mayor to account and publicly distance yourselves from such disgraceful behaviour, lest you leave citizens with the impression that this conduct is acceptable to you personally and to this body as a whole. While it may otherwise be a cliché, here, on this occasion, your silence will speak volumes.

Further to your motion of censure, I suggest Mr. Darling owes Mr. Goodwin and the Saint John Citizens Coalition and its members an unreserved apology for his reprehensible behaviour. That apology should be extended to all citizens of Saint John and be published prominently on the same Facebook page where the exchange of July 30, 2019 has been allowed to rot for days on end. It would also be prudent for the Mayor to assure all citizens that there will be no repeat of his unacceptable social media behaviour so long as he remains in office. I would also recommend that he open this communications channel to ALL citizens or shut it down altogether. It may be his 'personal' Facebook page, but when he speaks "As your Mayor...", it belongs to us all.

While Mr. Darling ponders his future course of action, Common Council has a duty to restore the integrity of the office of the Mayor and the good reputation of the City of Saint John in the minds of right-thinking people everywhere. A clear commitment to cherished democratic values is required. It is inconceivable to me, that anyone would expect sustainable population growth in a city in which citizen engagement is described by the Mayor as an unwelcome distraction rather than an essential ingredient in a healthy democracy. Democracy requires that people actively participate in the political process. Citizens who are fulfilling their civic duty by holding government to account between elections should not, and must not, be disparaged *for* doing so, or be discouraged *from* doing so. I trust this Council agrees, and I very much look forward to your public response to the serious concerns expressed in this letter.

Yours sincerely;

Douglas James  
Citizen and taxpayer

Enc. July 30, 2019 Full Facebook Screenshots Exchange

cc: Hon. Jeff Carr, Minister of Local Government; Andrea Anderson-Mason, Attorney General