

I Survived Four Years Of Bullying By Town Hall

2010 – 2014

By Craig Gammie

The right of residents to participate in the decisions of our government is the cornerstone of our democratic system¹.

That includes the right to criticise the policies and proposed policies of our local council.

Yet in spite of that democratic right to participate, TSBP council over the last four years has done everything possible to put a chill on resident participation and to silence anyone who dared to speak up.

Their attacks on me were certainly the most publicised. But they were not the only attacks on residents and they may not have been the most serious attacks. Many attacks have not been exposed because the residents who were attacked feared further repercussions if they spoke of the attacks. Many feared and still fear being sued by council if they criticise.

Here is a chronology of the attacks on me that illustrates their bullying tactics.

On February 3, 2011, I wrote a letter to mayor and council, critical of a report proposing commercial development of the beach at Sauble. Someone censored my letter. It never reached council.

On February 4, 2011 a press release was issued by Mayor John Close and then-CAO Rhonda Cook, groundlessly accusing commentators (including me) of workplace harassment.

On February 28, 2011 an e-mail from then-CAO Rhonda Cook to Municipal Affairs contact Luanne Phair asked for help in stopping me from participating. (Rhonda got no help from MAH).

On May 24, 2011 John Close or the town published a press release which labelled me and other commentators as “criminals”, “bullies”, and “a plague on the town”, and which implicitly claimed that I and other blog contributors use “violent and abusive language” against staff, and that I and other blog contributors gain power by harassing professional women, and which predicted that I and other blog contributors would, if action were not successfully taken against us, escalate into “more serious acts of violence”. The allegations were as false as they were ridiculous. I had never even posted to the targeted blog.

The May 24, 2011 released also asked for citizens to give the town the identities of certain anonymous bloggers. One council member complied, providing the town with personal information that he had taken, without authorization, from a private database.

¹ The word democracy comes from the greek word (*dēmokratía*) which means “rule of the people”.

On August 16, 2011 then-CAO sent an email to a resident accusing me and others of causing costly delays on the Sauble area small water systems upgrades. The allegation was false.

In a November, 2011 column in the Warton Echo, Councillor Turner named me “the Denialist” and made serious, false and humiliating allegations against me, including an allegation that I and others had cost the people of TSBP “over a million dollars in delays on one or two projects alone”, and an allegation that I had accosted more than one town staff member “on the streets of Warton”. Councillor Turner even mused in the column about passing a law to stop me from participating².

In a December 12, 2011 e-mail to an engineering company staff member, then-CAO Rhonda Cook said: “Mr. Gammie makes every attempt to derail the process ... “[Mr. Gammie] is a constant thorn in our sides”. The allegations were false. My efforts were all geared to keep the decision process rational and on the rails.

In January 2012 I (along with three others) was sued by council for \$700,000, for criticising them.

To illustrate how groundless the lawsuit was, consider this passage:

“Ms. Jackson is trying, without any legitimate mandate, to use her position as councillor to sell her personal views about the act and about MNR’s enforcement strategy as the position of the residents. This, in my view, is outrageous and fraudulent.”

The lawsuit claimed that this passage defamed then-CAO Rhonda Cook. Not councillor Jackson, but Rhonda Cook. But the passage doesn’t even mention, allude to or connect to the Cook in any way. This is an illustration of how the lawsuit was not at all grounded, but was rather frivolous and vexatious.

The lawsuit was groundless and unwinnable by the town, and was soon dropped. Still the lawsuit put a huge chill on participation by others and turned most commentators silent in fear of reprisals. Council used the lawsuit to provide an example of what happens to residents who dare to criticise³.

In late 2011 testimony by two council members, (John Close and Karen Klages), and three staff members (Angie Cathrae, Rhonda Cook, Christine Beard-Laaber) got me charged with 7 counts of practicing engineering without out a license. They got me charged by cutting and pasting some words I had said to give the words a totally different meaning, much like a kidnapper

² “I’ve said before that our job as voters doesn’t end when we mark the ballot, that we have an obligation to watch over those we elected and there is no price you can put on freedom of speech but on the other hand [Craig’s] behaviour makes me want to do something I hate doing – pass a law!” (Councillor Jim Turner – Warton Echo, November 2011)

³ To her credit, Councillor Jackson realized that that council’s lawsuit was improper, and successfully moved to stop funding it. The lawsuit was withdrawn the very next day.

would construct a ransom note from magazine clippings. I faced \$150,000 in fines and possible incarceration.

The charges were dropped when a judge declared that falsified minutes were not usable evidence and that the testimony of the witnesses that the minutes were accurate was false.

On November 20, 2012 Councillor Kirkland slandered me in open session with these words: "I'll still make the comment that [Gammie has] caused enough grief in this municipality to uh .. last a hundred people". It was gratuitous and untrue.

On December 16, 2012 Councillor Bowman alleged to the OPP that I had criminally harassed her over the telephone. It was a lie. I talked to her for over ten minutes. If I had really been harassing her surely she would have hung up. No charges were even considered by the OPP.

On February 19, 2013 Chief Financial Officer Neiffer, with full support of mayor John Close, censored, without valid reason, my submission regarding the budget.

On the morning of May 11, 2013 Clerk Cathrae stopped me from speaking at a public meeting regarding septic inspection. (She also tried to stop me in the afternoon meeting, but failed.)

In an August 30, 2013 sworn affidavit, John Close alleged that I had tried to get him charged with obstruction of Justice. The allegation was false.

In a December 2, 2013 letter to the Ontario Freedom of information and protection of privacy office, Clerk Angie Cathrae accused me of making blog attacks on staff and council members. The allegation was false, greatly exaggerated at very least.

In the same December 2, 2013 letter Ms. Cathrae alleged that on November 20, 2012 I wilfully recorded a closed session. That was false. I did record a closed session. But it was accidental, not wilful. I never ever had possession of the accidental recording. The irony is that six months later the same clerk accidentally recorded a closed session, in contravention of policy.

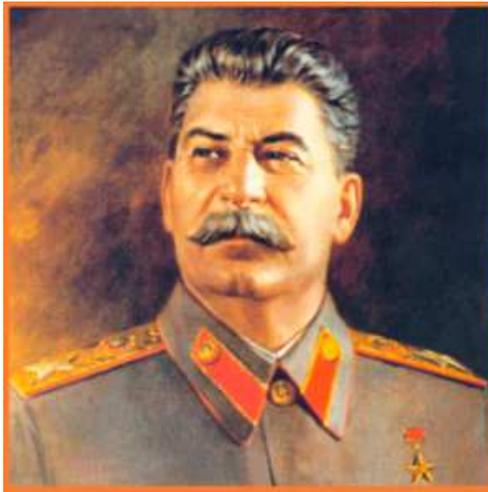
On November 20, 2012 I was banned from all council meetings and from town hall. The reason first given was that I had intentionally and secretly recorded a closed session. But when they realized that the "reason" would not fly they changed the reason to say I was banned because of "a pattern of questionable behaviour". Then they scrambled to fabricate a record of such behaviour, including sworn testimony by mayor Close and by Administrator Jacquie Farrow-Lawrence. The fabricated record of my "questionable behaviour" included the following:

Jacquie-Farrow Lawrence swore examination that on November 23, 2012 I had entered the clerk's office and got in her face and loudly threatened her. Under cross-examination, Ms. Farrow-Lawrence admitted that she had not been hired until two months after the alleged threatening incident, and that she had been nowhere near the town at the time. She then changed her testimony from "***I know*** that Mr. Gammie got in her face and threatened her to "***I heard*** that Mr. Gammie got in her face and threatened her." A judge who read the affidavit and the transcript remarked that Ms. Farrow-Lawrence got the information sworn in her affidavit

from standing around the water cooler gossiping, months after the events that she was gossiping about. Remarkably, the Clerk refused to file an affidavit. The “pressing” did not happen. It was concocted. To try to justify banning me.

Ms. Farrow-Lawrence also swore that I had put a picture of Stalin on my blog, with a caption that said “too Close For Comfort”, and that with the picture and caption and warning (all in the text box below). Ms. Farrow-Lawrence testified that I had implied that Mayor Close was a ruthless, evil dictator like Stalin.

Text box from www.bruceonthebruce.wordpress.com January 28, 2012



Too Close for Comfort!

**WARNING! WARNING! WARNING! WARNING! WARNING!
WARNING! WARNING! WARNING! WARNING!**

IT SHOULD BE NOTED THAT THIS ARTICLE IS AN OPINION BEING EXPRESSED AND NOT TO BE TAKEN LITERALLY! THERE MAY BE SOME PROFANITY USED SO IF YOU TAKE OFFENSE EASILY READ NO FURTHER! DO NOT READ IF YOU ARE A GUTLESS WONDER THAT BELIEVES OUR RIGHT TO FREE SPEECH IS NOT OUR RIGHT TO SPEAK FREELY! DO NOT READ THIS IF YOU BELIEVE THAT CIVIL SERVANTS HAVE THE RIGHT NOT TO WORK IF THEY ARE OFFENDED BY LOUD MOUTH RED NECKS! DO NOT READ THIS IF YOU BELIEVE THAT RIGHT IS WRONG AND WRONG IS RIGHT! DO NOT READ THIS IF YOU THINK OR BELIEVE THAT OUR TAX DOLLARS ARE BEING SPENT WISELY IN THE TOWN OF SOUTH BRUCE PENINSULA!

Farrow was wrong on all counts. First of all it was not my blog where Farrow-Lawrence found the picture of Stalin and the caption and the warning. My website is www.craigammie.com. The material was on www.bruceonthebruce.wordpress.com. I am not affiliated in any way with the website www.bruceonthebruce.wordpress.com where Farrow-Lawrence found the Stalin picture.

I did not post the picture, I did not write or post the “caption”, and I did not write or post the warning. I did not post them on the website www.bruceonthebruce.wordpress.com, or on my website, or anywhere else. I had never seen the picture or the caption or the warning until they were pointed out to me sometime a fair while after they were posted.

While under oath, Farrow-Lawrence made a serious but clearly false allegation against me.

All to try to justify banning me from council on November 20, 2012.

There are many more false allegations in Ms. Farrow-Lawrence’s affidavit and cross-examination transcript. I will include them in an update to this document at a later date⁴.

The current mayor also filed affidavits against me, and was cross-examined on one. In the affidavits and examination he too made many false allegations.

He alleged that I had threatened physical violence against staff. That was false.

He testified that he believed that I had backed Ms. Cathrae up against her office windows and threatened her. It never happened. Mr. Close did make clear that he had not seen me back Ms. Cathrae up against her window and threatened her. He made clear that he had only heard that I backed Ms. Cathrae up against her window and threatened her.

The most ridiculous was the allegation that at a public meeting on January 31, 2012 I thrust the pointed end of a stick into a man’s stomach so hard that the man doubled over in pain. What Mr. Close did not realize is that someone video recorded my chat with the man. What the recording shows is that there was no point on the stick, that there was a third person standing between me and the man, that the stick never came within three feet of the man, that the man did not double over in pain, and that the man did not even flinch.

The mayor made up a lie to try to justify banning me from council for a “pattern of questionable behaviour”.

In the same affidavit the mayor alleged that in a February 10, 2013 meeting at which he was not even present council passed a resolution that one of my signs be removed, and that I refused, and that the police were called. His allegation was false. There was no such resolution by council. Had there been such a resolution, I would have immediately complied. There was absolutely no need to call the police. And there was nothing wrong with the sign.

⁴ Or I may post the affidavit and transcript of cross-examination.

Again, Mr. Close made a serious false allegation to try to justify banning me from council meetings.

Mr. Close filed three affidavits against me. He was cross-examined on one. His affidavits and cross-examination transcript are full of false allegations. I will include more of them in an update to this document at a later date⁵.

Having failed to silence me with lawsuits and false allegations, some at town hall turned to public defamation and humiliation to try to silence me. Up until that point I had defended myself against their lawsuit and false accusations, but I had not really gone on the offensive. But when they started slandering me, I said enough is enough, and I went on the offensive. I sued three of them for defamation. Not for a lot of money like their stupid \$700,000 lawsuit against me. I sued for a measly \$10,000, and I made it clear that all I really wanted was an apology.

To my surprise, to everyone's surprise, instead of taking responsibility for their actions, and instead of trying to resolve the matter through clarification or apology, they merely reached into the people's treasury to defend themselves and to pay off any settlements awarded against them. They used the people's treasury to allow themselves to publicly slander any resident and bear absolutely no consequences. They used the treasury as their own private kitty.

Council had a choice. They could have chosen not to pay council members' private legal bills. They chose instead to pay all their private matter legal bills. That was a wrong choice. They are solely responsible for billing their private matter legal costs to the residents. They should be held accountable for that wrongdoing.

I could not stop them from billing their private matter legal costs to the taxpayers, and I did not want them to continue to take money from the residents for their private legal expenses, so I dropped the two outstanding lawsuits.

When I am elected I will fight to put policy in place so that no council member or staff member or board member can ever again use taxpayer dollars to bully a resident.

I will fight to put policy in place so that no council member or staff member or board member can ever again use taxpayer dollars to avoid the consequences of wilfully defaming a resident.

And I will fight to put policy in place so that no council member or staff member or board member can ever again use taxpayer dollars to avoid the consequences of violating the municipal conflict of interest act.

As you can see, in spite of four years of dirty tricks, they have failed to silence me. In fact instead of silencing me, all their actions just made me more determined to stand up for the residents, and to replace their misrepresentations with the truth.

⁵ Or I may post the affidavit and transcript of cross-examination.

Please elect me and some like-minded people so that residents will never again have to fear speaking out.

Craig Sammie