

Council decision sends 'troubling message' says IC complainant

By Kathryn Fraser

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On July 28, Caledon Town Council met to discuss the Integrity Commissioner (IC) complaint ICI-2026-001.

Council in the end came to a decision that Councillor Lynn Kiernan was not to face any monetary repercussions but instead issue an apology to the complainant Sarah Leslie.

Leslie responded to The Citizen with a letter stating her complaint was 'never about limiting political debate or preventing elected officials from engaging with residents on social media.'

Instead, it was a matter of ensuring elected officials 'conduct themselves respectfully' and in accordance with the Code of Conduct they have agreed to conduct themselves as elected officials.

'I have always supported respectful discussion and recognize that disagreement is part of democracy,' says Leslie. 'The Integrity Commissioner, an independent officer appointed by Council, conducted an investigation and concluded that Councillor Lynn Kiernan breached Section 3 of the Council Code of Conduct. That finding was not made by me. It was made by an independent investigator after reviewing the available evidence and hearing from those involved.'

Much debate happened around the Council table, including deleted Facebook comments and procedural fairness, she continues, but too little of the discussion focused on the actual findings of the Integrity Commissioner's report.

'Unfortunately, much of the public conversation has focused on me rather than on the conduct that led to the complaint,' says Leslie. 'In the days and weeks following the investigation, I have read comments suggesting I wasted taxpayers' money, that I should never have filed a complaint, and that I somehow deserved the treatment I received. Those assumptions ignore an important reality: every resident has the right to raise concerns through the accountability process established by Council without being ridiculed or personally attacked for doing so.'

'What is particularly disappointing is that the public discussion shifted away from the Councillor's conduct and instead focused on her role as a Councillor with integrity. While Councillor Kiernan may be an effective representative for her constituents, I believe her conduct on social media in this instance fell short of the standard of professionalism and respect expected of an elected official. Residents suggested that filing a complaint was a waste of taxpayers' money, when the reality is that this investigation became necessary because of the Councillor's actions.'

'If Council truly believes taxpayers should not bear the cost of Integrity Commissioner investigations, then perhaps the discussion should focus on the conduct that causes those investigations in the first place. Accountability begins with the actions that trigger the complaint, not with the individual who reports misconduct.'

Leslie says assertions she had a 'professional relationship' with the Town and was subject to the municipality's Vendor Code of Conduct were untrue as her contract with the Town expired in December 2025. This, she says, means she was not bound by the Vendor Code of Conduct and this matter was a 'distraction' from the Integrity Commissioner's actual findings.

'I also find it concerning that so much attention was given to public opinion rather than to the Integrity Commissioner's recommendations,' she says. 'Accountability should never be determined by who has the largest group of supporters in the gallery. If the discussion is to shift toward public popularity or community support, it is equally important to recognize my own commitment to this community. I was born and raised in Caledon, and today I am proud to be raising my own children here. For the past 11 years,

I have dedicated thousands of volunteer hours to supporting local initiatives, events, organizations, businesses, and charitable causes. Throughout that time, I have built strong relationships across our community and have always been committed to making Caledon a better place for residents and local businesses alike.

?That commitment was recently extended beyond my own neighbourhood. When businesses in a neighbouring community were unexpectedly impacted by a significant road closure, I volunteered my time and expertise to help the Councillor of Ward 3 organize an event aimed at bringing customers back to those local businesses. I did so because I believe supporting our communities should not be limited by municipal boundaries or personal interests, it is about stepping forward when help is needed. Sadly, I cannot say the same for others who represent the area or live in it.?

The public exchange on the issue, she adds, has had an impact on her personally and professionally.

?I own and operate a business in this community. My livelihood depends on the trust of residents, local organizations, businesses, and municipal partners. When an elected official publicly questions my integrity, motives, or professional relationships on a highly visible social media platform, in this case a Facebook group of 26k members, those comments have the potential to damage my reputation far beyond a single online discussion. In a close-knit community like Caledon, reputational harm can affect future business opportunities, partnerships, and the confidence people place in my work.

?Whether people ultimately agreed or disagreed with my views is not the issue. The issue is that I became the subject of personal accusations in a public forum by someone holding public office. That is precisely why standards of conduct exist for elected officials,? she says. ?Like every resident, I am entitled to express my views on municipal matters without concern that my livelihood or reputation will become the focus of a political dispute. Residents should never have to weigh whether participating in local democracy could expose their business or professional reputation to unnecessary public scrutiny.

?Council ultimately made its decision, and I respect Council's authority to do so. My purpose in filing this complaint was never to seek publicity or personal gain. It was to use the process that Council has established when a resident believes the Code of Conduct has not been followed. I hope this experience encourages respectful dialogue from everyone involved in municipal government. Strong political debate is healthy and necessary, but it should never come at the expense of mutual respect or create circumstances where residents fear participating in public discussions because of the potential impact on their reputation or livelihood.

?At the end of the day, I remain proud to be part of this community. My character and commitment to this community are reflected in years of volunteer service, collaboration, and advocacy. I will continue contributing to Caledon through my business, volunteer work, and community involvement, and I hope future conversations, whether online or in Council Chambers, focus on ideas and issues rather than personal attacks.

?Council ultimately chose to reject the Integrity Commissioner's recommended sanction and replace it with an apology. While I appreciate that an apology was ordered, it does little to reinforce public confidence in the accountability process when Council can simply disregard the recommendations of the independent officer they appointed. This decision sends a troubling message. If an independent Integrity Commissioner finds that a Councillor breached the Code of Conduct, yet Council chooses to remove the recommended consequences, it raises legitimate questions about whether the accountability system is functioning as intended.?