

Council receives mid-term Code of Conduct refresher from Integrity Commissioner

By Jessica Laurenza

Caledon's Integrity Commissioner, John Fleming, spoke to Council on March 8 regarding the Code of Conduct's guidelines for appropriate social media use.

Fleming's role in regards to social media is to determine whether something that has been said, done, tweeted or posted is acceptable in the realm of political life or whether it is in breach of the Code. Fleming spoke to Council on their personal social media use, not that of the general public's.

Councillors Innis, Kiernan and Downey addressed the need for mandatory training of the Code for Council members and strongly supported revising and strengthening the social media guidelines included in the Code.

Councillor Innis told her colleagues that "as soon as we participate on any social media it legitimizes what is being discussed?you need to be accurate. We need to portray the truth to the best of our ability."

Social media is the modern-day equivalent of town square where people can gather to voice their opinions. Although social media can be used as a positive, informative tool for what's happening in the municipality, it can also be toxic for those who don't respect diverse opinions and ideas.

Fleming noted that blocking constituents on social media is interpreted as an issue of free speech. Blocking should only be used if language is hateful, racist or discriminatory. There is a distinct difference between voicing an opinion and spreading misinformation or making derogatory comments.

Innis stated she has blocked residents who have spread misinformation or posted disrespectful comments about her. When Innis reaches out to residents to clarify their comments, she said they allegedly feel targeted while she is "trying to defend [her] reputation."

Fleming reminds Council that the ultimate purpose of the Code is to ensure the confidence of the public.

The Commissioner states "the things [Council has] found objectionable are the kinds of things that are emblematic of the political environment you're in." That is to say that in this so-called "town square," members of the community are able to share their perspectives, no matter how diverse they may be, while being respectful of others.

"In an adult, professional setting, one would think we wouldn't have to create guidelines around name calling or defamation," noted Councillor Downey.

She recognized the multi-faceted complexity of social media and called for a deeper analysis into the details of the Code to make it more specific.

Additionally, Councillor Kiernan said she doesn't see a downside to ensuring training is mandatory for everyone and enquired about possible monetary penalties for non-compliance and participation.

Fleming reminded Council of some of the Code sections pertaining to social media use: members need to behave in a manner respectful of all views no matter how diverse views may be; members need to ensure communication and presence on social media platforms will be fully compliant with social media guidelines; members may seek advice from the Integrity Commissioner if specific situations arise.

Mayor Allan Thompson ended the meeting with a statement, noting that these principles aren't only relevant to social media use but everyday life.

?Everyone is entitled to have a voice, everyone needs to be respected ? even if you don't agree with them,? he said.