

Integrity matters

by SHERALYN ROMAN

At the end of the day, what do any of us have to offer to the world and to our families but our integrity? What is integrity, and why, oh why, do we need to have an Integrity Commissioner when it comes to politics? It would seem the answer to the second question is because some folks who enter into the political arena seem to have a limited capacity for answering the first question. Integrity is defined as the "quality of being honest and having strong moral principles that you refuse to change," and might further be described as someone who "behaves ethically and does the right thing, even behind closed doors." In what appears to be a pattern, having first been found by the Region of Peel's integrity commissioner in 2021 to have inappropriately shared confidential information on social media, our current Mayor has now been found guilty of two more integrity breaches.

As revealed this past Friday, Mayor Groves was the subject of an integrity commission investigation related to two separate matters and was found guilty of breaching integrity standards in both. They are each also related to serious bylaw matters (that department, as you might recall, being one of those decimated in the recent "downsizing and departures" fiasco at town hall) is concerning, whether or not you agree with Mayor Groves who, according to the report, feels she was right and acting on behalf of her constituents.

If you have not yet seen the report, here's the highlight reel: On two separate occasions involving significant bylaw infractions taking place in our community, Mayor Groves was found to have inserted herself directly into matters of bylaw enforcement, a finding the integrity commissioner called, "a pattern of Mayor Groves interfering with staff in the exercise of their independent duties." In one of the matters, OPP had been called in to support bylaw officers in the performance of their duties (removing contaminated soil from a property), yet despite the police presence, Mayor Groves intervened, something integrity commissioner John Fleming referred to later in his report as "the Mayor...acting outside of her legitimate authority." Claiming to have offered all of council the opportunity to engage in legal training to help provide awareness of their roles and responsibilities and provide a firm understanding of their position, power, or lack thereof. Fleming noted also in his report that Mayor Groves "absented herself" from these sessions. I find this almost as disturbing as the charges themselves because integrity to me also means when mistakes are made (after all, we are all human), it's our ability and willingness to learn from those mistakes when provided opportunities to do so that speaks to our character and integrity.

Further damaging, I believe, is the use of language directed at town staff, whom our Mayor reportedly referred to as "cowboys," implying the individuals involved were acting of their own accord and without regard to stated standards and practices. One would have thought we were long past name-calling and using potentially derogatory terms that may have been used (inappropriately) in school yards decades ago, but apparently not. Thus, adding to his report, the integrity commissioner commented that such use of language "casts aspersions on the professional competence and credibility of officials of the town." Perhaps then, it is no wonder that both the head and manager of bylaw enforcement have since resigned.

Citizens of Caledon should be disappointed. We're not even at the midpoint of Mayor Grove's term of office, and already, there has been an integrity commission investigation into alleged wrongdoing. This comes hot on the heels of 15 town employees resigning or being "shown the door." We cannot help but wonder what's going on at town hall.

What we do know is that integrity matters. Who you are behind closed doors should be the same as who you are when in a front-facing position. Perhaps Mayor Groves believes this is the case and that her actions are defensible. However, when she has been found to have breached the Code of Conduct, and further, that she "does not appear to appreciate the seriousness of her misconduct," the integrity commissioner's findings suggest otherwise. Caledon is undergoing significant change in the coming months and years. Provincially mandated strong mayoral powers have been granted to many municipalities, including ours. Two breaches of the Code of Conduct related to integrity, resulting in a four-week suspension of pay, are not good signs of things to come.