

Subject: RE: Public Input & Council Behaviour of Mayor and C. Denault

Date: Sun, 13 Jan 2002 12:35:55 -0800

From: "John Hunter" <johnhunter@idmail.com>

To: <brian_platts@telus.net>, "Don Bell" <belld@district.north-van.bc.ca>

CC: "Bill Denault" <bill_denault@dnv.org>, "Doug Mackay-Dunn" <doug_mackay-dunn@dnv.org>, "Ernie Crist" <ernie_crist@dnv.org>, "Heather Dunsford" <heather_dunsford@dnv.org>, "Janice Harris" <janice_harris@dnv.org>, "Lisa Muri" <lisa_muri@dnv.org>, "NVD Council" <dnvcouncil@dnv.org>, "Allan Orr" <allandorr@shaw.ca>, "Annette Martin" <annettem@digital-rain.com>, "Bill Tracey" <bill_tracey@telus.net>, "Cathy Adams" <cathyadams@canada.com>, "Corrie Kost" <kost@triumf.ca>, "Dave Sadler" <davesadler@telus.net>, "Eric Andersen" <eric@seatrade.ca>, "Felipe Grossling" <felipeg@shaw.com>, "Liz James" <cagebc@yahoo.com>, "Peter Thompson" <bedeconsulting@shaw.ca>, "FONVCA" <fonvca@fonvca.org>

I appreciate the excellent letter by Mr. Platts below. He was there and saw this spectacle too, as did many others.

Frankly, I have been in business long enough and have a thick enough skin that it did not occur to me to be offended by C. Denault's shot at me, until another gentlemen approached the Mayor after the meeting and said I was owed an apology. Well, even in hindsight, I am not overly offended by shots from C. Denault, but several other aspects of the incident do disturb me and should disturb all citizens. I suggest it should also disturb Councillors who expect any respect from citizens.

People work hard to provide public input, and unlike council, we are not remunerated for that work. C. Denault's behaviour could be intimidating to members of the public less accustomed than I and regular Council Watchers to the "rough and tumble" of politics or business. It discourages public input. This was advertised as a "workshop" on the budget - is this how you encourage people to participate - by taking shots at them? And C. Denault did not pose it as a question to me - it was as described by Mr. Platts below in a derisive tone of voice.

Perhaps C. Denault was just tired and ill-tempered, given that he arrived nearly two hours late for the public hearing?

C. Denault described my logic as "flawed" in public in this session. Well, I am a big boy, and I can live with someone challenging my facts or logic. (whether on this topic I was in error we'll address another day). BUT when minutes later Dr. Kost USED EXACTLY THE SAME WORD to describe C. Denault's position in calling me wrong, all hell broke loose. A flurry of "Point of Order" and "Point of Privilege" fly from the lips of C. Denault and C. Harris, as Mr. Platts describes below. It seems some people can dish it out but can't take it. It seems a councillor can critique a citizen but not vice versa. Frankly, I thought it was hilarious.

But it got worse. The Mayor, who frequently chastises or rules out of order citizens for their remarks aimed at Council or staff, sat immobile when C. Denault took his public shot at me in this "workshop" where supposedly one encourages open interchange. Worse yet, in this case,

the Mayor then tried to silence Dr. Kost for using exactly the same word as C. Denault had used, making the double standard even more obvious. The Mayor did not "walk the talk". This is far from the first time the Mayor has failed to act, including during cheap shots by a certain Councillor aimed generally at C. Crist in Council sessions. Yet if C. Crist steps out of line, the Mayor is all over him.

Councillors have complained in the past about the lack respect from the public for Council. This type of double standard and not "walking the talk" is exactly the sort of thing that destroys respect for Council, as does C. Denault's behaviour. In the past, we have even seen him yell at a member of the gallery (on tape too) who was expressing their views by (silently) shaking their head.

Council, like any person, does not automatically deserve respect. You must EARN it. You will not if this type of behaviour and double standard is allowed.

Mayor and Council, there are rumours you are developing a policy to curtail or control public input even further. Kindly consider applying the same standards to your own behaviour towards fellow councillors and the public.

John Hunter

-----Original Message-----

From: Brian Platts [mailto:brian_platts@telus.net]

Sent: January 12, 2002 7:46 PM

To: Don Bell

Cc: Bill Denault; Doug Mackay-Dunn; Ernie Crist; Heather Dunsford; Janice Harris; Lisa Muri; NVD Council; Allan Orr; Annette Martin; Bill Tracey; Cathy Adams; Corrie Kost; Dave Sadler; Eric Andersen; Felipe Grossling; John Hunter; Liz James; Peter Thompson; FONVCA
Subject: Public Input & Council

Mayor Bell:

Whenever a member of the public brings to your attention a complaint about Council or District Staff, you tell that person to put the complaint in writing. Well that is exactly what I am doing right now with this e-mail.

At today's Budget Workshop Mr. John Hunter made a very detailed and professional presentation. Upon conclusion of this presentation, Councillor Harris -- rather than thanking Mr. Hunter for coming to the District Hall on a Saturday to give his input based on his many years of business experience -- tried her best to discredit his argument that the District receives below market value for its land portfolio. Following on Councillor Harris' heels, Councillor Denault derisively made

reference to the "flawed argument" put forward by Mr. Hunter. Despite this clearly disrespectful behaviour directed towards a member of the public who was not in position to respond, you did nothing to correct it, Mayor Bell.

While the above is bad enough, the next speaker from the public, Mr. Corrie Kost, objected to the line of questioning by Councillor Harris and also Councillor Denault's "flawed argument" comment. When he calmly pointed out that in fact they were wrong and Mr. Hunter was right, both these petulant Councillors reacted with shouts of "POINT OF ORDER!!!" You in turn Mayor Bell, admonished not the two councillors, but instead directed your authority at Mr. Kost and told him to be "respectful" with his comments! Watching this disgraceful scene from the public gallery, it was all I could do to remain silent.

Why is it you tolerate certain councillors attacking the integrity of well-meaning citizens who come forward to participate in local government decision-making? On the other side, the least hint of provocation on behalf of a speaker results in hysterical calls for "POINT OF ORDER MAYOR BELL!!!" which you then use to frustrate legitimate comment. The only conclusion to be drawn is that in its application, there is a much higher standard of conduct that exists for members of the public than for the councillors themselves. This sort of tactic is nothing short of intimidation.

I have written to you before regarding this clear bias, but you did not respond. While I personally prefer a free debate and discussion, if you are going to demand such strict confines for the public, Mayor Bell, then it is about time that you held ALL councillors to this same standard.

Sincerely,
Brian Platts