

ROBERT J. SWAYZE

INTEGRITY COMMISSIONER

MUNIE: (519) 942-0070
FAX: (519) 942-1233
E-mail: robert.swayze@sympatico.ca

20736 Mississauga Road
CALEDON, ONTARIO
L7K 1M7

OFFICE OF THE INTEGRITY COMMISSIONER

OPEN SESSION REPORT

TO: Mayor Brian Bigger and Members of Greater Sudbury City Council

FROM: Robert Swayze, Integrity Commissioner

DATE: June 28, 2021

MEETING DATE: July 14, 2021

SUBJECT: Second Code of Conduct Complaint against Councillor Montpellier

Recommendation:

It is recommended that the compensation paid to Councillor Gerry Montpellier be suspended for a period of 60 days commencing with the next pay period.

Background:

In January of this year, I investigated a complaint against Councillor Gerry Montpellier alleging that he publicly criticized staff in a letter to the Prime Minister and gave an interview to CTV News on the letter. I found the criticism to be severe and contrary to the *Code of Conduct for Members of Council and Local Boards*. (the "Code"). I recommended that Council suspend the compensation paid to him as a Councillor for a period of 60 days. Council did not accept my recommendation, reducing it to a reprimand.

On May 19, 2021, I received an anonymous complaint alleging that he publicly criticized staff for the second time in an interview he granted to the Sudbury Star. The article was published on the same day as the complaint was filed with me and it is attached to this report. He refers to the fire management staff as having a "condescending nature" and "endorsing warfare". The same article quotes him as accusing fire management treating volunteer firefighters as "third-class citizens".

I am advised that the continuing negative public statements by a person who holds a position of influence and authority about staff are having a serious impact on the morale of the professional firefighter staff.

The Code provides as follows:

“14 (2) No Member shall maliciously, falsely, negligently, recklessly, or otherwise improperly, injure the professional or ethical reputation, or the prospects or practice, of any one or more City employees.”

Analysis:

It is obvious that the reprimand against Councillor Montpellier, delivered by Council, has not deterred him from continuing to publicly harass professional fire staff. His statements in the interview with the Sudbury Star constitutes a second offence under the Code.

Decision

In my opinion, the statements made by the Respondent, were purposely an attempt to injure the professional reputation of the professional firefighter staff. I find them to be contrary to Section 14 (2) of the Code.

I now strongly recommend a sanction of the suspension of his salary for 60 days for a second offence, beginning with the next pay period. If he continues to make negative public comments about staff my next recommendation will be 90 days suspension.

Prepared by:



Robert Swayze
Integrity Commissioner

Attachment(s): Sudbury Star Article, May 19, 2021

[Previous Story](#)[Next Story](#)*Article rank | 19 May 2021 | The Sudbury Star | MARY KATHERINE KEOWN*

Sudbury's volunteer firefighters suffering poor morale - survey

They also say they don't trust management or the city

The city's volunteer firefighters have reached a breaking point.

A 10-question survey circulated recently by and for volunteer firefighters shows growing dissatisfaction with the work environment, as well as sinking morale and general discontent. The Star obtained a copy of the survey, along with a letter sent to councillors, from a member of council. All identifying information was redacted before the documents were shared.

Most concerning, the survey indicated 64.5 per cent of volunteers are considering or have thought about quitting the fire service. Morale is quite low. More than 71 per cent of respondents said they do not feel "appreciated, wanted and respected by the current fire service administration." Only 13 per cent feel their efforts are appreciated.

About 24 per cent of respondents indicated morale amongst volunteer firefighters is terrible, while 34.6 per cent qualified it as poor. Twenty-seven per cent of volunteers said morale is fair and 12 per cent viewed it as good. Only 1.9 per cent of respondents qualified morale as excellent.

While about 200 individuals are currently volunteering as firefighters, 107 replied to the survey. Anonymity was assured.

"The average participation for an employee survey is between 25-60 per cent. At nearly 54 per cent, the survey participation is on the higher end of the average, which shows the importance of the results," organizers said. "We are pleased so many volunteers took the time to complete the survey. It is our opinion that participation was so high due to our promise of anonymity. With volunteers being disciplined for speaking their concerns publicly, many were relieved names would not be revealed in the presentation of results."

Approximately 72 per cent of respondents said they believe the relationship between volunteers and full-time firefighters is acrimonious at best.

Volunteers were especially pessimistic about the management team. Nearly 85 per cent of respondents said they do not believe "the current fire service administration has the best interests of volunteers in mind." More than 76 per cent (76.64 per cent) said they do not trust the current administration; only 3.7 per cent said there is trust between the two groups. It should be noted 19.6 per cent chose not to answer that question.

"The results are clear and speak for themselves, volunteers are currently very unhappy with the treatment they have been receiving," organizers said. "The information revealed is troubling. You have already heard from the fire management team regarding their opinion of the current status of volunteers. This survey is our chance for you to hear from volunteers about how they are feeling."

Organizers said the results contrast sharply with what "the chief reported during recent council meetings."

When asked if they feel comfortable bringing concerns about the volunteer fire service to the platoon chief, 68 per cent of respondents said no. Only 24 per cent replied yes.

"We have seen volunteer numbers be reduced significantly and we believe this can be easily improved with your help," organizers said. "Volunteers in general are a hardworking group, often very committed to their communities. We want the chance to fix these issues before it's too late. Many councillors have stated the city couldn't afford to lose their volunteer firefighters. We believe this is true. We need your help and we need it now. Please act before it's too late."

Volunteers had several ideas to improve the fire service, as well as the relationship between career and volunteer firefighters, and management. Among their top recommendations were better training and equipment; better treatment and improved communication; a real effort to retain volunteers; and the elimination of annual physical fitness testing.

Several volunteers also commented that the city needs to revise its dispatch mechanisms. They said the closest trucks should always be sent to incidents, and career trucks should not be sent to volunteer areas unless it is truly warranted.

There was also good news. Volunteers want to work with the city to improve the working environment and the professional relationship. More than 92 per cent of those who answered the survey said they would like to see a committee established that would enable volunteers to speak directly to council.

"After reviewing this information, we are requesting that council establish a liaison committee made up of volunteers and city councillors so that council could have a direct impact on improving this dire situation,"

organizers wrote to council. "Urgent action is needed and it is clear the majority of volunteers do not believe the current fire management team can or has ambition to fix the issues. Our hope is the parties who form this committee will work collaboratively and earnestly to find meaningful solutions to the situation we currently find ourselves in."

The results of the survey were sent previously to members of council so The Star emailed all councillors, as well as Mayor Brian Biggar, seeking commentary. Only one councillor replied.

Despite the fact several wards in Greater Sudbury — including Wards 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 9 — rely on volunteer firefighters, only Ward 3 Coun. Gerry Montpellier offered to share his thoughts.

"Volunteers dedicate their time to our community, and it's obviously not for the dollars," Montpellier said. "Why they're demoralized mostly, is due to the condescending nature of their superiors. It comes from the full-time ranks — the management. Who would not be demoralized by a city — an employer — who endorses warfare. I have documented proof they (the International Association of Fire Fighters) wanted to declare (the volunteers) rivals."

Montpellier said he is not surprised by the survey results "in any way, shape or form." He said volunteers are treated worse "than thirdclass citizens." He does not understand why the poor treatment, but he said his "heart is broken."

"It's an American union attacking a Canadian union and the employer accepted that," Montpellier said. "What company would accept that?"

The city said it knows nothing about the survey, but it continues to work collaboratively with its volunteer firefighters in order to resolve concerns.

"The city has not commissioned an employee survey related to our volunteer firefighter employees. The city has not been informed by CLAC that they have conducted a survey of their members," Kelli Sheppard, a spokesperson for the city, said. "The survey was not sent directly to any city staff member by the organizer. We value our volunteer firefighters and their feedback on the workplace. If there are concerns amongst any city employee, we have several methods to resolve them. These resolution processes are detailed in the employee handbook, respective collective bargaining agreements and human resource policies, which are accessible to all City of Greater Sudbury staff."

The Star was unable to reach the Christian Labour Association of Canada, the union representing volunteer firefighters in Sudbury, for comment.

This article was shared by a user of PressReader - an online source of publications from around the world. PressReader contains copyrighted material, trademarks and other proprietary information. Receipt of this article should not be interpreted as grant of any licenses express or implied, to the intellectual property of PressReader or publishers of publications presented. PressReader, 200-13111 Vanier Place, Richmond BC V6V 2J1, Canada Phone: +1 604 278 4604 © 2003-2020 PressReader Inc. All rights reserved. Terms of Use: <http://care.pressreader.com/hc/articles/206528495-Terms-of-Use> Privacy Policy: <http://care.pressreader.com/hc/articles/205818089-Privacy-Policy>

[Previous Story](#)

[Next Story](#)