

Statement from the City of Mount Pearl

As delivered by the Deputy Mayor in the Public Council Meeting of June 30, 2020.

June 30, 2020 - As the Deputy Mayor of the city of Mount Pearl, I knew I would face some difficult times. Taking on a leadership role in a municipality comes with deep responsibilities and a commitment to make every decision, every day, based on the best possible information and the overall value of doing the right thing for the people of the city.

2020 has not been an easy year. We have all experienced the same things. A historic storm followed by this unprecedented pandemic that none of us knew how to manage. But we have persevered so far.

I wish to thank the people of Mount Pearl for their patience during the first six months of 2020 that brought us some big challenges.

Over the last week, it has become public that our CAO, Steve Kent will not be returning to his position. Today Council voted on the Motion to Dismiss. I will not get into the many actions that led to this day, but I will tell you that we remain focused on the policies and legislation that guide us in our city. We are placed in these roles by the residents of the city and we are expected to uphold the policies and the legislation.

However, today we are faced with a further troubling situation.

Two members of Council and Mr. Kent have been in communications via Facebook Messenger on matters related to the investigation and sharing of confidential information pertaining to the investigation. It is important to note that only messages between the CAO and members of Council were viewed. The communication was accessible to the city via a city owned iPad that had been previously issued to Mr. Kent. Our IT policies are very clear that any content that is available on a city owned device is subject to Access to Information legislation and should be treated as such by all staff. As we stated last week, it was very obvious that the nature of the messages was not only inappropriate for the CAO, but two sitting councillors were also involved in the communications.

The Councillors in question were found to be:

- In conflict of interest pertaining to the harassment investigation of Chief Administrative Officer on leave
- In breach of the duties of the office as a member of Council pertaining to the investigation and decision-making responsibilities associated with the harassment complaint involving the CAO; and
- To have released confidential Council information to the CAO.

Our policies and procedures are in place to guide us all and to ensure we maintain a value system of integrity, fairness, honesty and respect. I, as Deputy-Mayor, and the remaining members of Council, believe it is incumbent upon us to fully denounce such actions and act accordingly. Our City Council Code of Ethics Policy was breached. The City of Mount Pearl Act mandates that Council “shall, by resolution, declare vacant the office of an elected councillor” where a Councillor speaks to or votes on a matter in which he or she has a conflict of interest. Today we are bound by this Act and it is under this legislation that we have declared the seats of Councillors Power and Ledwell vacant.

We fully recognize the impact that this will have. But we believe we must work hard to repair the damage this has caused and try to rebuild trust with our employees, with our union and with the residents of Mount Pearl. We will immediately begin to work towards restoring a healthy and safe work environment, and a welcoming and trustworthy community.

We have much work to do and tonight we make a public commitment to understand what is needed to regain positive relationships.

We also make a public commitment tonight to focus once again on Mount Pearl as a wonderful community, a place to raise our children and proudly take care of one another.

We deeply regret being forced to take such action.