

Township of  
**Langley**



Est. 1873

## **NEWS RELEASE**

**FOR RELEASE: January 8, 2021**

### **PETITION TO REMOVE MAYOR AND COUNCILLORS DISMISSED**

Today, the BC Supreme Court ruled and dismissed a petition to remove Mayor Jack Froese and Councillors Bob Long and Blair Whitmarsh from office.

“We had every confidence that the judge would rule against the petition, as all legislative regulations regarding campaign donations had been followed,” said Froese. “It is unfortunate that taxpayers’ money and resources had to be wasted on this baseless, frivolous claim.”

Ten residents of the Township launched the petition late in 2019, alleging the Mayor and Councillors named had been in a conflict of interest by accepting campaign donations from contributors affiliated with development firms while their projects were “in stream” and under consideration by Council.

Justice Paul Walker ruled against the petition on January 8 and dismissed the case, stating there was no evidence of “pecuniary interest,” (conflict of interest) as the named Council members received no financial benefit in exchange for their votes.

The judge found no link between the campaign contributions, which were legal, and how the Council members voted.

Previously decided cases in BC had found that campaign contributions alone do not give rise to a conflict of interest.

“It was really disappointing to see the names of Council members – as well as business people in the community who are working hard to build homes and workspaces in our municipality – tarnished in this way. They have been unfairly impugned when they have done nothing wrong,” said Froese.

He said the petition felt like a personal vendetta against certain members of Council, as all members of Township Council had received campaign donations from people representing various interests, yet they were not named in the petition.

“Court cases like this appear to be more smear campaigns than anything legitimate,” Froese said. “No evidence is presented to support allegations of wrongdoing, yet damage to reputations can still be done, even when a case has no merit.”

He added that such lawsuits are a deterrent for those thinking about seeking office. The threat of being taken to court by someone who doesn’t like the decisions you have made, and the possibility of financial hardship, personal attacks, and a ruined reputation may prevent people from putting their names forward.

“Running for a seat on council or any elected body is a huge decision,” Froese said. “If you earn the votes of the public and secure a place with local government, it is an honour that can be truly gratifying, but it can also be an all-consuming and controversial undertaking that often goes beyond the political and becomes personal.”

“Everyone is different,” Froese said. “Our residents want different things for themselves, their families, their neighbourhoods, and their communities, which is understandable. Unfortunately, for some people, compromise or what is best for the majority is not included in their equation, which makes it difficult to reconcile the needs and wants of everyone.”

“Council’s job is to weigh all the options and consider what we feel is best for the Township as a whole. That is why we were elected,” Froese said. “Of course, not everyone will agree with those decisions, and taking members of Council to court appears to be just another method of expressing dissatisfaction.”

“It is a shame this method was such a costly one, for the parties wrongly implicated and for our taxpayers,” he said, noting the court case will cost the Township in excess of \$50,000.

Regarding the matter of the projects being “in-stream” at the time of the 2018 election campaign, Froese noted that the Township is the fastest-growing municipality in Metro Vancouver and builders are creating places for people to live and work in. It takes years for projects to get to the Council level for approval, and they are constantly “in stream” during the process. In this case, the projects cited dated back to 2015, with some concluding in 2019 - months after the election and with a new Council.

Council members cannot simply vote in favour of a project – for whatever reason – unless it has already gone through vigorous legislated processes and guidelines. All projects are vetted and recommended by municipal staff, whose job it is to ensure all necessary requirements are met before they go to Council for approval. In this case, all of the Council decisions in question followed the recommendations of Township staff and virtually all of the decisions were either unanimous or close to unanimous.

“Council members are not technical experts in community development, engineering, or the environment,” Froese said. “They are teachers, farmers, and business people. They are people who are dedicated to serving the community, but not specialists in these fields.”

“A great deal of expertise is required to ensure any proposed developments meet a multitude of criteria, and we rely on our staff, with their extensive educations and decades of experience, to do the background work required and supply us with the information necessary to make a decision.”

Froese also wondered if the petitioners had fully considered the consequences of their actions, which – had the petition been successful – would not only have removed a number of sitting Council members, but would also have called into question 19 votes on projects bringing valuable developments to the community, such as road construction and sewers.

“We are pleased this is behind us and are happy to be moving forward with the Township’s important business,” Froese said.

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