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North Vancouver council censures mayor

Mussatto called out for amalgamation 'bullying'

[Brent Richter](#) / North Shore News

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City of North Vancouver municipal hall. Photograph by: file, North Shore News

City of North Vancouver council - or at least the majority of it - is distancing itself from comments made by Mayor Darrell Mussatto in a message to the North Vancouver Chamber of Commerce.

Mussatto sent the email the day after chamber president [Louise Ranger made a presentation to council in February, asking elected members to support a restructuring study \(http://www.nsnews.com/news/city-of-north-vancouver-council-divided-on-restructure-study-1.876178\)](http://www.nsnews.com/news/city-of-north-vancouver-council-divided-on-restructure-study-1.876178) - what is commonly the first step towards amalgamating two local governments.

In his email, the mayor wrote that Ranger's presentation was a sign of personal disrespect, given all the chamber events and activities he has supported in the past.

"And I have co-operated with the chamber - at great expense to my personal political capital - in leading the charge on crucial economic issues like the Low Level Road. It is with little hesitation that I say if I had not shown the leadership, the expansion project would not have happened," he said.

Mussatto said he was shocked and disappointed that the chamber would speak in favour of the restructuring study without first coming to him to discuss it.

"I will certainly have to re-assess this relationship - if, on the basis above, you can say we actually have one," he wrote before asking Ranger to circulate the email to the chamber's board of directors. "I hope you will have the decency to at least do that."

However, Coun. Guy Heywood, the council member who introduced the restructuring study, said the mayor's email was "inappropriate to the office of the mayor" after moving a motion to have council go on the record disassociating itself from the email and to write to the chamber stating council appreciates the chamber's role and welcomes its input.

"I was certainly shocked by the response that they elicited for that and I believe it's important to put up one's hand when there's intimidation and bullying towards individuals and organizations that come to council in good faith, believing they have a right to express opinions on controversial matters and not be bullied for them," Heywood said.

The fact that the mayor sent the message the next day indicated that he had enough time to consider his words before going after the chamber for expressing a "well known, longstanding view" that chamber members have about amalgamation, he added.

Heywood also called out the mayor for implying that his support for initiatives favoured by the chamber should come with any expectations.

"I hope that he supported (the Low Level Road) project because he believed it was in the best interests of the community and not in exchange for the chamber's silence on other issues that it believes in but happens to disagree with the mayor," he said.

Heywood added that the public has a right to give input to council without it being pre-screened or preapproved.

Couns. Don Bell and Pam Bookham joined in making statements critical about the mayor's conduct.

"You have to allow for disagreement and you have to rise above whatever personal response you might have in terms of loyalties or expectations and recognize that as mayor, you have a great deal of authority, but you also have a great deal of responsibility. I think you did not do justice to the office you are elected to," Bookham said.

After listening to the comments from across the table, Mussatto spoke in his own defence, standing by his position that amalgamation would only hurt city residents and businesses.

"I've always been opposed to amalgamation. I am opposed to amalgamation and I'll continue to stand up for the citizens and businesses in our community and for their best financial interests," he said. "Amalgamation has not worked. It's been a disaster in almost every other area where municipalities have done it and I will stand up for residents."

As for the his relationship with the chamber, the mayor stood by that too.

"I've had discussions with both the general manager and president Louise Ranger and Mr. Alan Haigh, the chair, and I have a very good relationship with them and I hold them in the highest regard and I support the chamber fully in the work they do, they have done and continue to do. They're very good people as are all the members of the board of the chamber. And I want to wish them continued success in the work that they do."

Heywood's motion passed 4-3 with Couns. Craig Keating and Linda Buchanan joining the mayor in voting against it.

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