

# north shore news

## EDITORIAL: Gag reflex

North Shore News

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In the name of expediency, City of North Vancouver council teetered dangerously close this week to doing away entirely with the weekly public input period because of commentary staff said was “off-topic, accusatory, repetitive, untrue, promotes goods and services and, at times, includes electioneering.”

But if those were grounds for silencing debate, who among us wouldn't have a sock crammed in our craw from time to time?

Council members ultimately made the right decision and decided two minutes of what-for from constituents wasn't worth being labelled enemies of free speech.

But we may be headed down an even murkier path, after council moved to ban speakers who have demonstrated “behaviour that can be seen to constitute bullying and harassment” toward staff. That's an awfully broad definition. Instead of silencing everyone in council chambers, it could be used to only silence council's critics.

Democracy is messy. Politicians should expect to receive public scorn. It comes with the job. And the bureaucracy that serves the public is not beyond reproach either.

There is precedent for councils banning individuals from speaking but only in the direst of cases.

If the level of discourse at the city is really so poor that we're using the terms libel and harassment, there is another venue to deal with that — the courtroom.

We urge council to step very carefully.

If they truly want more efficient meetings, they could consider cutting down on some of their own speechifying and notices of motion, some of which exemplify “off topic, accusatory and repetitive.”

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