

Subject: Re: Notice Of Motion-setting up a Special Committee to establish criteria to display Art objects in the DNV Municipal Hall and public buildings-Ernie Crist

Date: Thu, 24 Mar 2005 15:55:55 -0800

From: Brian Platts <bplatts@shaw.ca>

To: Ernie Crist <ernie_crist@dnv.org>

CC: JMaloney@northshoreoutlook.com, Elizabeth James <cagebc@yahoo.com>, Mayor and Council - DNV <Council@dnv.org>, Senior Management Committee <managecomm@dnv.org>, John McPherson <John_McPherson@dnv.org>, James Ridge <James_Ridge@dnv.org>, Nathalie Valdes <Nathalie_Valdes@dnv.org>, poetic_licence@hotmail.com, fonvca@fonvca.org, nvartscouncil@telus.net, Corrie Kost <kost@triumf.ca>

Dear Councillor Crist:

With all due respect you are off on a tangent. I couldn't care less WHAT the "artist's" intention is because it is completely irrelevant. The District's Corporate Policy States:

Policy 7-2585-2 Anti -Harassment in the Workplace - Personal or Sexual Document 211184

"Note: That while it may not be the harassers' intention for harassment to occur ... it has been found that the intent of the harasser is irrelevant ... "

This policy was created by you and the rest of Council, not me, nor Cathy Adams, Liz James or Corrie Kost. I am not condemning the artist in any way. He can produce whatever images he wants to for whatever purpose he chooses. I am also not going to get into your debate over the meaning or value of art. We can do that another time.

The issue at hand is this: you have proposed a motion to set up a committee to debate "good art" from "bad art" and decide what art work is suitable for display in the Municipal Hall. My point is that such a committee is unnecessary because the District's Corporate Policy already lays out values conducive to a safe and positive workplace environment. These existing District policies just need to be reinforced to the Community Arts Council. In the meantime, the offending material should be removed and returned to the artist. No doubt he has already received more publicity over this display than he ever dreamed of getting.

Sincerely,
Brian Platts

Ernie Crist wrote:

Dear Mr. Platts:

Did it occur to you that the artist did what he did PRECISELY because he wanted to say that women have become sex objects and are living in an environment of violence for the sake of corporate profit? Why is a painting different from a photograph, even though both are forms of art? What is the difference between a writer and a painter even though both are artists. What is the function of canvass art. What is the function of ART period, can you tell me? Is it not a tool to critique society as seen by the artist? Can you or Mrs. Adams or Ms James tell me whether the artist glorified women being sex objects as portrayed on TV, 90 % of the time, or did he merely point to it?

Saying that, yes, they ARE sex objects and yes they ARE victims of violence and are vulnerable, but these paintings are not suitable because we don't wish to deal with it anymore than we want to challenge corporate sponsored gratuitous violence on TV, is one thing. I can certainly accept that. However, to condemn the artist and/or pull his work off the wall is quite another.

Are you, Mrs. Adams, Dr. Kost and Mrs. James saying and please correct me if I am wrong, that this may be so, but we still think it is inappropriate for such paintings to be in the Municipal Hall - you know see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil?. Or if you want to say it, you must be nice about? Maybe the artist was too crude. Is this the case? I just wanted to know where you want to draw the line. So please tell me. Do you wish to see only beautiful scenery? That too can be arranged. You know always be nice like Uncle Tom was, hence the Committee - a Committee, by the way, would not be a permanent Committee.

Yours truly,

Ernie Crist

From: Brian Platts [<mailto:bplatts@shaw.ca>]

Sent: Thursday, March 24, 2005 12:28 PM

To: Ernie Crist

Cc: Elizabeth James; Mayor and Council - DNV; Senior Management Committee; John McPherson; James Ridge; Nathalie Valdes; poetic_licence@hotmail.com; fonvca@fonvca.org; nvartscouncil@telus.net; Corrie Kost

Subject: Re: Notice Of Motion-setting up a Special Committee to establish criteria to display Art objects in the DNV Municipal Hall and public buildings-Ernie Crist

Dear Councillor Crist:

I'm sorry, but I thought we had previously established EXACTLY why I and others have said these paintings are not appropriate for display in the Municipal Hall. You keep saying that it is up to us to say why they should be removed and we keep telling you.

Allow me to quote what Cathy Adams has already described about these paintings:

- 1) women's bodies, some apparently naked, with no heads
- 2) a woman's body from the waist down, lying on her back, legs spread apart, with multiple (male) faces covering the background
- 3) pale images of women with many bright images of guns overlaying different parts of their bodies
- 4) words of a sexual nature imprinted multiple times on several of the paintings - phrases such as "How Sex Feels to a Man" and adjacent to that one a phrase something like "Find His Hot Spot".
- 5) a painting of two pale female images, which look to be naked, with no heads, and a bright spot of paint at the crotch of one of them
- 6) "Titles" on many which more than suggest violence, including against women
- 7) several paintings which glorify guns - a black background with multiple bright images of guns

Contrary to your statement, the wording of the District's Corporate Policy Manual DOES apply in this case. Just because someone calls something "art" does not make it exempt!!! Based on the above description, I ask you, does this display comply with the following policy:

Policy 7-2585-2 Anti -Harassment in the Workplace- Personal or Sexual Document 211184
Volunteers are expressly included in this policy.
Examples of sexual harassment includes **"display of ... sexual materials in the form of degrading pictures, graffiti, cartoons or sayings."**

Policy 7-2585-1 Positive Workplace Environment Document 381437
"Responsibility for creating and maintaining a positive workplace environment rests with all persons sharing our workplace, including Council members, all employees and volunteers."
It goes on to state **"Individuals MUST refrain from conduct that MAY offend, embarrass or humiliate others."**

There is no genie that has been let out of the bottle -- unless one considers the media a genie (how this issue ended up there I have no idea). Simply put, the Community Arts Council and artists have a duty to comply with the District's Corporate Policy if they wish to use the District Hall to display art work. Failing compliance, management has the responsibility to immediate take action to stop any activity that undermines this policy and the values of the District. This is not a complicated matter.

Sincerely,
Brian Platts

Ernie Crist wrote:

Dear Mr. Platts:

I don't think it is as simple as that. The Genie is out of the bottle. You cannot make demands to remove paintings which were an artists moral take on a social and moral

issue because in your opinion they were not up to someone's standard, and then walk away and leave the matter hanging. Saying, why can we not use "common sense" and leave it where it was before, is not good enough anymore. It is too late for that now. It is not fair to the Artist, the Arts Community and it is not fair to Council, to staff and the community at large.

You people have demanded removal of these paintings so tell the world why, otherwise Council will be accused of interfering with artistic expression without debate, censorship without providing reasons etc. You may well be right and whatever the outcome of the debate, is fine by me personally. This, as I said, is after all, a public building and not a museum. Just the same, the community and the artists have a right to know what is acceptable and what is not.

In any case, I think that such a debate will be fruitful and quite frankly is long overdue. It may well clear the air and expose all kinds of cobwebs. It may well be an education for some. Also, let's find out what the standards of "morality" in this community really are.

Cheers,

Ernie Crist

From: Brian Platts [<mailto:bplatts@shaw.ca>]

Sent: Wednesday, March 23, 2005 5:44 PM

To: Ernie Crist

Cc: Elizabeth James; Mayor and Council - DNV; Senior Management Committee; John McPherson; James Ridge; Nathalie Valdes

Subject: Re: Notice Of Motion-setting up a Special Committee to establish criteria to display Art objects in the DNV Municipal Hall and public buildings-Ernie Crist

Dear Councillor Crist:

After much consideration I am not sure that I can support your motion. It bothers me that we have come to this point after so many years of successful art work displays within the District Hall. As far as I know this is the only time when there has been any controversy. (I should note that Mrs. Adams was not the only one to complain in this instance. I did too, and so did others.)

In my view, it should never have got to this point because common sense should have prevailed with those involved realizing that such material was obviously not appropriate for display in the Hall. As Mrs. Adams clearly established, the material in question even violates specific sections of the District's Corporate Policy Manual. This is not a subjective analysis in any way.

I am frustrated that because of this one instance of poor judgement, we must now form a committee to debate "good art" from "bad art". I think everyone welcomes the the opportunity for local artists to display their work within the District Hall. Why can't the NV Community Arts Council simply learn from this episode and strive to be more sensitive in the future? I don't think we need to blow this whole thing out of proportion.

Sincerely,
Brian Platts

Ernie Crist wrote:

Dear Ms James;

Look at the bright side. It will provide the community with an opportunity to debate the difference between "good art" "bad art", and "acceptable art", acceptable that is to the majority of the public at this time. The only comment I have is that the human body, including the female body, is ugly or beautiful depending on the eye of the beholder only and no more so than is the case with a horse or a goat by way of example.

The posterior of the horse and the goat serve the same purpose as those of a human and are being drawn by artists without opposition and public outcry. Is it a question of inherited prejudice, cultural taboos and Zeitgeist biases that have their origin in social and cultural needs and values of the time ? And what if these needs and values change as was the case yesterday, today and tomorrow? Why is it one might ask that a person finds nothing wrong with looking at a horse's posterior in real life or when depicted in a painting but has problems with that of a human?

Also why is it that nudity is acceptable in a nudist colony and if seen through an "almost" bathing suit but not on a painting. I am just asking a question.

As one man said "let a hundred flowers bloom and a thousand thoughts contend". I know what I think but I am looking forward to this one, if for no other reason than listening to the rationale of the participants.

Yours truly,

Ernie Crist.

From: Elizabeth James [<mailto:cagebc@yahoo.com>]

Sent: Wednesday, March 23, 2005 7:52 AM

To: Ernie Crist; Mayor and Council - DNV; John McPherson; Senior Management Committee; James Ridge; Nathalie Valdes

Cc: Cathy Adams; Brian Platts; Corrie Kost

Subject: Re: Notice Of Motion-setting up a Special Committee to establish criteria to display Art objects in the DNV Municipal Hall and public buildings-Ernie Crist

23 March 2005

Dear Clr. Crist:

It is with some reluctance that I support this idea.

Reluctant because I find it sad that, as with the policy on a positive workplace environment, it appears that appropriate behaviour, or appropriate artwork for that environment cannot be decided without a piece of paper in hand to describe.

I am also disappointed that female members of the Arts group would place the interests of *avant garde* artistic freedom, ahead of respect for the female person as a potential viewer. Is it any wonder we have a problem with continuing violence against women? There's an axiom abroad that goes something like this: If one wishes to have the respect of others, one must first respect oneself.

Sincerely,
Liz James

Ernie Crist <ernie_crist@dnv.org> wrote:

Notice of Motion - To establish a Special Committee of Council to establish criteria for the display of art objects in the Municipal Hall and in other Municipal Public Buildings in the District of North Vancouver - Report Councillor Crist.

Whereas paintings by one particular artist recently displayed in the District Hall resulted in complaints primarily from one person who found these paintings offensive and unsuitable to be exhibited in a public building and

Whereas the suitability of paintings and other Art objects to be displayed in the Municipal Hall is based on subjective criteria (beauty is in the eyes of the beholder) and

Whereas on the other hand the Municipal Hall is a public place where criteria of suitability are not necessarily determined by artistic merit but by subjective factors determined on what is considered "Main Flow Art" and is acceptable to the majority of people

Therefore be it resolved that Council set up a Special Committee consisting of one representative of Council, one representatives of the Arts Council, one representative of the North Vancouver Arts Commission, one District Staff member to be appointed by the Municipal Manager or the Municipal Manager himself, two representatives of FONVCA and one representative of the Arts Department of Capilano College and further be it resolved

That this Special Committee be requested to establish criteria and guidelines as to what is suitable to be exhibited in the Municipal Hall as well as in other Municipally owned Public Buildings in the District of North Vancouver and further be it resolved

That this Special Committee return recommendations to this effect to District Council by no later than June 15,2005 and further be it resolved

That the City of North Vancouver be invited to send an observer to the meetings of this Special Committee and further be it resolved

That the paintings currently exhibited in the Municipal Hall which in the opinion of this one person are unsuitable to be displayed in the Municipal Hall be removed until such time when the report from this Special Committee is returned to Council and a decision pertaining to this issue has been made.

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