



**Integrity Commissioner Report  
Town of Hornepayne  
March 26, 2026**



## Table of Contents

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Preamble .....	3
Overview of the Complaint .....	3
Historical Context – C2 .....	4
Historical Context – C1 .....	5
Code of Conduct Allegations – Mayor Fort 2024 .....	5
Conflict of Interest Allegations – Mayor Fort.....	6
Details of the Conflict of Interest Allegations .....	6
Information from Mayor Cheryl Fort.....	9
Interview of CAO Manuela Batovanja.....	9
Meeting Minutes and Restructuring Plan.....	9
September 17, 2025 Town Hall .....	10
Interview of C2 – Town Hall Meeting.....	12
Recording of Town Hall Meeting – September 17, 2025 .....	14
Interview of Mayor Fort – Town Hall Meeting - September 17, 2025 .....	17
Text Message from C1 to Mayor Fort – December 30, 2025.....	19
Complaint February 27, 2026 – Restructuring .....	20
Review of Meeting, Minutes, Agendas & Declarations of Pecuniary Interest .....	20
Standard of Proof.....	21
Analysis: Conflict of Interest .....	21
Analysis: Breach of Procedural Bylaw 2047 Town Hall September 17, 2025	24
Conclusion and Recommendations .....	27
Appendix A – Credibility Assessments .....	30



## Preamble

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Expertise for Municipalities (“E4m”) is the appointed Integrity Commissioner for the Township of Hornepayne (the municipality) as the Integrity Commissioner. E4m is a statutory officer of the municipality. The Integrity Commissioner reports to Council and is responsible for independently performing functions assigned to them by the municipality.

E4m has been appointed by the municipality as the Integrity Commissioner for all functions set out in section 223.3(1) of the *Municipal Act* 2001, and E4m is responsible for conducting inquiries into whether a member has contravened the Code of Conduct pursuant to section 223.4(1) or contravened sections 5, 5.1 or 5.2 of the *Municipal Conflict of Interest Act* pursuant to section 223.4.1 (1).

The *Municipal Act*, 2001, awards the Integrity Commissioner a number of powers that the Integrity Commissioner can exercise while conducting Code of Conduct and *Municipal Conflict of Interest Act* inquiries. Specifically, subsections 223.4 (3) and 223.4.1(10) provide that “the municipality and its local boards shall give the [Integrity] Commissioner such information as the [Integrity] Commissioner believes to be necessary for an inquiry.” Moreover, subsections 223.4(4) and 223.4.1(11) provide that the Integrity Commissioner is “entitled to have free access to all books, accounts, financial records, electronic data processing records, reports, files and all other papers things or property belonging to or use by the municipality or a local board that the Commissioner believes to be necessary for an inquiry.”

E4m has appointed Sean Sparling of SPS Inc. to investigate and report to Council on this matter as an agent of E4m.

## Overview of the Complaint

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This public report pertains to several complaints filed by the same individuals against Mayor Cheryl Fort. There are complaints filed under the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* (OHSA), *Municipal Conflict of Interest Act* (MCIA), *Ontario Human Rights Code* (OHRC), Code of Conduct for elected officials for the municipality, and so on. There is a long list of complaints addressed in this report. The very first complaint goes back to May 2024, and the last complaint was filed on February 27, 2026. The complaint on February 27, 2026, was made against Council as a whole, including Mayor Fort.

There are important contextual facts surrounding the complaints that are not evident within the complaints themselves that are relevant to these matters. It is also important to understand that there are two primary complainants against Mayor Fort. These complainants are closely related to each other and have very clear personal interests in the outcome of this inquiry. For the purposes of this report, the complainants have been



identified as C1 and C2. C2 has been involved in various complaints with Mayor Fort since 2020 that began outside her role as mayor for the municipality and involve her personal employment.

As part of our inquiry, we have completed a detailed credibility assessment of the complainants and the respondent. These are found in Appendix “A” of this report. In summary, C1 and C2 were found to be not credible or reliable in their evidence. The respondent, Mayor Fort, was found to be credible and reliable in her evidence to the inquiry.

## Historical Context – C2

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The following historical information is contained in a publicly available adjudicator’s decision dated January 22, 2024. In April 2020, Mayor Fort and C2 were co-workers. Over the course of April 24 to 26, 2020, C2 engaged in conduct directed at Mayor Fort, which was later found to be a violation of the workplace harassment policies. During these events, C2 repeatedly communicated with Mayor Fort by electronic messaging. The following is a very short summary of what C2 communicated to Mayor Fort;

*“...false pretense, its all bullshit, you are only fooling yourself and all those who do not know your true self, what a joke! You are such a fraud!”*  
*“...think again you selfish bitch!”*  
*“...you are sick in the head...”*

The adjudicator found that C2’s comments to Mayor Fort;

*“...could reasonably be expected to cause offence, humiliation, or physical injury to his Coworker (Mayor Fort)...”.*

Specifically, C2 was found to have threatened Mayor Fort with physical violence. The adjudicator also commented;

*“...The words “fare thee well...” followed immediately by “by the knife” can reasonably be understood as a threat of physical violence.”*

C2 was dismissed from his employment due to the findings of his misconduct directed at Mayor Fort in their workplace. In upholding the dismissal, the adjudicator stated;

*“...misconduct in this case is very serious. His messages were offensive and humiliating, and they could reasonably be interpreted as a threat of violence...(C2) has not accepted responsibility or truly apologized for his behaviour...”*



This inquiry is not meant to re-litigate the historical matters involving C2 and Mayor Fort. They are part of the natural history of the complaints being reported on here, and provide an important backdrop to all the complaints filed against Mayor Fort by both C1 and C2.

## **Historical Context – C1**

In 2020, Mayor Fort filed a workplace complaint involving C1 under the municipality's Workplace Harassment Policy. An external investigator concluded that C1 had breached the policy. The municipality implemented measures, including restrictions on direct one-on-one communications between the Mayor and C1, along with other internal administrative actions not described here due to the confidential nature of the employment matters. These restrictions remained in place during the period relevant to this inquiry and provide context for the subsequent complaints filed by C1 and C2, helping explain the interactions between the parties.

## **Code of Conduct Allegations – Mayor Fort 2024**

In May 2024, C1 submitted a complaint against Mayor Fort to the Integrity Commissioner under the Code of Conduct, citing fifteen (15) alleged contraventions of the Code as well as potential breaches of provincial legislation, including the OHS Act and the OHRC. The allegations, dating back to 2018, related to interactions between C1 and Mayor Fort.

A comprehensive investigation into the allegations was conducted, and a detailed report was prepared in accordance with the Municipality's workplace policy. The report cannot be released publicly due to the confidentiality protections that apply to this type of investigation.

With respect to the allegations of breaches of the Code of Conduct, it was determined that Mayor Fort had, on occasion, exceeded the appropriate boundaries of her role in interactions with staff. The Integrity Commissioner provided guidance regarding appropriate role conduct, and the Mayor cooperated fully with these recommendations and adjusted her practices accordingly. Any further elaboration on the specific actions or circumstances cannot be provided, as doing so would be contrary to the confidentiality protections that apply to this investigation.

Under section 223.3(1) of the *Municipal Act*, 2001, the Integrity Commissioner may report to Council publicly on any matter that the Commissioner considers appropriate. While the Integrity Commissioner does not regularly mention workplace harassment complaints in a public report, it is necessary for the context and analysis herein to include mention of these matters. The summary provided here constitutes that report in accordance with the Act. As these matters were fully addressed during the Integrity Commissioner's inquiry and the



Commissioner is satisfied that the issues have been remedied, they do not form part of the present inquiry and will not be considered further in this report, except insofar as they are referenced to provide historical workplace context.

## **Conflict of Interest Allegations – Mayor Fort**

Prior to July 2025, C1 was employed by the municipality. On July 30, 2025, C1's employment ended as part of a restructuring of staff positions. On August 29, 2025, C1 swore an affidavit in support of allegations that Mayor Fort breached the MCIA under sections 5, 6, and 7, and the municipality's Code of Conduct (By-Law 1749) for improper use of influence, breach of confidentiality and interference with staff. There were many other ancillary complaints filed by C1 under the guise of the MCIA and conduct complaint against Mayor Fort.

The allegations made by C1 were, to say the least, voluminous. The effort to distill the complaint into something manageable was considerable. In completing this investigation, the inquiry interviewed C1 and the CAO of the municipality, Ms. Manuela Batovanja. The inquiry also reviewed very extensive documentary evidence that included meeting minutes (open and closed), the staff restructuring plan created by Ms. Batovanja, as well as several other related items. Based on the two interviews and materials reviewed, the inquiry was closed.

## **Details of the Conflict of Interest Allegations**

C1 provided that she had been an employee of the municipality since September 2015. Mayor Fort was first elected to Council in September 2016 and became Mayor in 2018. C1 explained that she was off work from October 2023 and returned to work in February 2024. When returning, she was disciplined for a matter. As a result of this, she filed the OHSa complaint against Mayor Fort and another municipal employee. This was filed on May 2, 2024. C1 went off work again and returned in July 2025, just prior to the restructuring at the municipality.

In summary, C1's complaint is that Mayor Fort participated in several closed session meetings of Council to discuss the restructuring of the municipality, while being the subject of the OHSa complaint that C1 filed against Mayor Fort. C1 believed that Mayor Fort used the restructuring as a veiled means to terminate C1's employment with the municipality and, in doing so, was creating a conflict of interest for herself.

Under the MCIA legislation, a conflict of interest has to amount to some type of pecuniary interest by Mayor Fort. The language in the MCIA is very specific on this point. The language found in Bylaw 1749 mirrors the MCIA regarding pecuniary interest; however, it



does expand the definition considerably. It is much broader in application than the MCIA. There is a more fulsome definition of the MCIA and Bylaw 1749 in the analysis section of the report.

C1 was asked to explain exactly what the pecuniary interest of Mayor Fort was in the restructuring of the municipality. C1 felt that through the restructuring, Mayor Fort was limiting her and the municipality's liabilities regarding the harassment complaint. C1 also believed that through the restructuring, Mayor Fort was lowering the level of scrutiny on her own personal expenditures submitted to the municipality. C1 stated;

From C1's interview;

Q. "...Is there anything that occurred that financially benefited her by doing any of this? Let's say she manufactured your termination – how does that benefit her financially...

A. *Not in that moment...from preventing me from going forth with any future action against the township and the mayor.*

C1 asserted in her affidavit that Mayor Fort breached the MCIA by;

*"...influencing matters despite conflicts, controlling public narrative, and benefitting from confidential information."*

C1 was asked directly if she had any evidence to support any of these allegations. Her response was;

*"Nope..."*

With regard to reducing the oversight over the Mayor's expenses, C1 indicated;

*"...if she gets me out of the way...I follow the rules, she can get me out of the way, then she can manipulate and twist the rules to get what she wants."*

CI was asked repeatedly if she had any actual evidence to support the extensive allegations she had made against Mayor Fort. By far, the majority of the complaint was based totally on C1's own assumptions and conjectures. She also based some of her allegations on rumours that she attributed to the community or staff members at the municipality.

There were also several allegations made by C1 that were not part of the MCIA complaint or even against Mayor Fort. Each of these allegations was put to C1, and she responded that they did not apply to the complaints about Mayor Fort but included them for reasons known only to C1. For example;



Allegation from C1's affidavit;

*"February 12, 2025, the township fabricated a title of "Office Manager" for XX and promoted her into the Clerk position without proper by-law authority".*

C1 was asked why this mattered in the context of the MCIA complaints against Mayor Fort. She answered;

*A. It doesn't matter to the MCIA.*

C1's complaint is replete with similar accusations and statements that are irrelevant to the MCIA or the Code of Conduct complaint against Mayor Fort.

In another example, C1 alleged staff members, including Mayor Fort, were breaching confidentiality. The context was one employee telling C1 (presumably while breaching confidentiality) that another employee told her about Mayor Fort's actions in filling various vacancies at the municipality. C1 was asked how this was relevant to the complaint she filed against Mayor Fort and how she even knew that Mayor Fort was involved in these staffing decisions. C1 responded;

*"Because I'm of the opinion that she's getting all this information in regard to the harassment complaint and then orchestrating changing senior management roles because she has knowledge of confidential information that she shouldn't have, and she's in a position to orchestrate these things and then eventually gets me out."*

To support the above statement, C1 produced a text message between herself and another staff member. That staff member attributed her knowledge to a second staff member. Mayor Fort was not at all referenced in the text message. C1 was asked directly how she (C1) knew Mayor Fort was involved in this issue at all. C1 replied;

*"No. I don't know."*

C1 did not provide any evidence to support her allegations against Mayor Fort. At best, her allegations were conjecture and assumptions on her part. She also failed in any way to connect the alleged actions by Mayor Fort to a pecuniary interest under the MCIA.

In reading the written complaint filed by C1, there was a portion that appeared to have been authored by another party. The language was different from the rest of the complaint; it was in a different tense and so on. This was raised with C1, and she was asked if she had assistance in preparing the complaint, and she answered that she did not.



## **Information from Mayor Cheryl Fort**

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After interviewing C1, the investigator met with Mayor Fort to advise her of the complaint. Mayor Fort was visibly upset and shaken by the allegations. It was not the allegations themselves that upset Mayor Fort; it was the constant ongoing complaints directed at her from the complainants (C1 and C2) that were quite visibly taking a personal toll on her.

Mayor Fort explained that she had nothing to do with restructuring the municipality and had recused herself repeatedly from matters having to do with C1 during the course of the OHSa investigation. She also explained that the actual restructuring plan undertaken by the municipality was the CAO's idea that she implemented in her role as the senior administrative employee.

## **Interview of CAO Manuela Batovanja**

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The inquiry interviewed the CAO for the municipality, Ms. Batovanja. She explained that prior to being hired by the municipality in her current position, C1 was off on leave from the workplace. This leave continued throughout her own (Batovanja's) hiring. During her pre-employment interview, she presented a restructuring plan as part of the competition. In that plan, she outlined steps she would take (if hired) to reduce costs and increase efficiencies in the municipality. This included bringing asset management in-house, restructuring various administrative functions, identifying opportunities she saw in Public Works, and not renewing a contract position in the Economic Development office.

Ms. Batovanja further explained that once she was in the position as CAO for the municipality, she had to manage all of the municipality's operations, and that included implementing the proposed restructuring she had laid out in her interview for her new position. Mayor Fort was not part of this planning process for the restructuring. In fact, Council as a whole was not involved except for being made aware of the restructuring plans and providing their direction to proceed. The inquiry is unable to provide further details on the direction from Council as it is subject to solicitor client privilege and was from a closed session of Council. The restructuring of C1's position was the first step of many in this process. Ms. Batovanja explained that anytime there was a direct conversation about C1, Mayor Fort declared a conflict and recused herself from the meeting.

## **Meeting Minutes and Restructuring Plan**

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As part of the inquiry, the various meeting minutes (including closed session), the planning documents for the restructuring and the presentation Ms. Batovanja gave during her hiring



have been reviewed. The inquiry also reviewed all of Mayor Fort's declarations of pecuniary interest from the time C1 filed her OHSa complaint against Mayor Fort and the time the restructuring was implemented that resulted in C1's job loss.

The final restructuring plan was presented to Council on July 23, 2025. This was after the OHSa investigation involving C1 was completed and found to be unsubstantiated. The restructuring plan includes the following;

- Detailed staff comparators between 10 communities of similar size, including Hornepayne. It demonstrated that Hornepayne had a higher number of administrative staff than all other comparator communities.
- The plan included 10 recommendations on how to restructure staff and the means to gain the efficiencies.

The evidence gathered regarding the restructuring clearly demonstrated the following;

- The concept of restructuring the municipality clearly originated from Ms. Batovanja, and this was prior to her hire. This was first presented to the hiring committee well before C1's return to work.
- The final restructuring plan was presented to Council on July 23, 2025. This was after C1 allegations under the OHSa were released, and she had returned to work.
- Mayor Fort recused herself from several discussions involving C1, mostly surrounding the OHSa complaint and legal matters involving C1. Mayor Fort filed several declarations of pecuniary interest leading up to the final restructuring plan being presented to Council by Ms. Batovanja on July 23, 2025.
- Mayor Fort was not involved in creating the final restructuring plan, nor was Council as a whole. It was an operational matter left to Ms. Batovanja.
- C1 was not the only job loss in the municipality. When her position was eliminated, the decision to end the Economic Development contract was also made.

At this point of the inquiry, the matter was concluded. There was no basis to continue the matter as it was clearly a frivolous complaint.

## **September 17, 2025 Town Hall**

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On September 17, 2025, Council for the municipality hosted a town hall meeting. This has been a semi-common practice by the Council, whereby they allow members of the public to ask questions of elected officials. This was a meeting of Council, and as such, rules of decorum, civility and so on apply. During this meeting, C2 was asked to leave the meeting by Mayor Fort due to his behaviour. C2 was escorted from the meeting by the police.



C2 filed a Code of Conduct complaint against Mayor Fort for removing him from the meeting. C2's complaint was filed by email on October 25, 2025. He had attempted to file the complaint with the municipality prior; however, Ms. Batovanja had refused to commission his affidavit for the complaint. This issue will be addressed later in the report.

The town hall meeting was recorded by a member of the public and made available to the inquiry for review. This allowed for an unbiased review of what occurred. In his complaint, C2 alleged that when Mayor Fort had him removed from the town hall meeting;

- She abused her authority and power
- She made misrepresentations to the OPP by claiming he was in violation of the Township's Procedural By-law 2047, but only provided section 4.3.1, omitting the remaining sections that have the required process for addressing an attendee. This omission caused the OPP to act without lawful basis or justification.
- Breached municipal bylaws, trust and violated C2's "Charter-protected rights" as a citizen lawfully attending a public meeting.
- That Mayor Fort addressed C2 in a confrontational and accusatory manner
- That, without any warning, motion or vote of Council, Mayor Fort directed that he be removed from the meeting.

C2 also alleged that Mayor Fort committed the following criminal offences;

1. Public Mischief Section 140 of the Criminal Code for causing the police to act on false pretenses.
2. Obstruction of Justice Section 139 of the Criminal Code. For interfering with a lawful process.
3. Breach of Public Trust Section 122 of the Criminal Code. For misusing the powers of her office.

C2 also quoted a variety of case law in support of his complaint. The following is a quotation from C2's written complaint about Mayor Fort regarding the Town Hall meeting;

*"Mayor Fort's deliberate withholding of the full by-law, coupled with her direction to police based on incomplete information, falls squarely within the principles articulated in these cases. Her actions were inconsistent with her statutory duties, carried out in bad faith, and represented a misuse of her official authority for an improper purpose."*

In distilling C2's complaint to its core, it is about him being ejected from the September 17, 2025, meeting by Mayor Fort and her not following the procedural bylaw to do so. There are ancillary complaints that she provided false or misleading information to the police, which they acted upon to remove C2 from the meeting.



The issue of Ms. Batovanja refusing to commission C2's complaint is not a matter within the jurisdiction of the Integrity Commissioner. It is a matter to be addressed by Council for the municipality should they choose to do so. I have addressed it in this report solely as it is relevant to the overall narrative of this complaint, C2's credibility and all these matters in general.

## **Interview of C2 – Town Hall Meeting**

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To fully understand C2's complaint, he was interviewed as part of this inquiry. The following are relevant excerpts from this interview.

- He attended the meeting on September 17, 2025, and everyone was allowed to ask questions.
- He asked about the tax rate in Hornepayne, which is 5.47 %, but no one on Council knew the tax rate, which made them (Council) uncomfortable.
- He was attempting to question the CAO, but Mayor Fort said he was trying to make them look bad. She said he wasn't going to make them look stupid, and he got kicked out of the meeting.
- Council didn't follow the procedure to kick him out of the meeting. There is supposed to be a discussion and then a vote to do this.

C2 was asked if there was a reason why he was removed from the meeting. For example, was he behaving? C2 advised that he was quiet. C2 was asked this same question several times. He stated that he was not arguing or being confrontational at all.

C2 complained that they only put one piece of the bylaw on the screen about attendees' conduct. By not putting up the whole bylaw, Mayor Fort misled the OPP in the process of having him removed from the meeting. C2 felt like Mayor Fort acted like his Charter Rights did not exist. C2 was asked;

Q. You weren't argumentative or raising your voice? You weren't warned or anything like that?

- Mayor Fort said, "You're trying to make us look stupid, get out."
- Mayor Fort told the police to throw him out. They got up and threw him out.
- He said he had charter rights under section 2, and the thing he said that they deemed was offensive was that they didn't know the tax rate.
- Mayor Fort never warned him before she kicked him out of the meeting.

C2 was adamant that he was polite and that there was no reason for Mayor Fort to have him removed from the meeting.

C2 was also asked to explain the issues he was raising about commissioning his affidavit for this complaint. He advised that when he attended the municipal office to file the complaint, he presented it to Ms. Batovanja to have it commissioned as required by the



complaint process. She refused, directing him to take it to another commissioner of oaths. C2 submitted to the inquiry that Ms. Batovanja is required under the Notarization Act to commission documents when asked to do so.

The Ontario *Notaries Act* governs Commissioners of Oath in Ontario. The legislation has been reviewed by the inquiry, and there is no requirement for a notary to provide such a service as described by C2. The *Notaries Act* says the notary “*may*” provide the service, not “*shall*”. C2 is incorrect in this submission to the inquiry.

This issue was canvassed with Ms. Batovanja. She explained there was no requirement for her to commission this complaint. She was concerned about C2’s ongoing behaviour and did not wish to facilitate its continuation. She advised C2 to attend to another notary to swear to the document. Ms. Batovanja explained that C2 continually contacts the municipality about his complaints. Since August of 2025, C2 has sent 48 emails on a variety of topics. He has copied in numerous officials from the municipality and different levels of government. In these emails, he is very demanding and makes repeated accusations against staff and the municipality. This is in addition to his personal attendance at the municipal office or his various access to information requests that he has made.

Throughout his interview, C2 also lamented that Council members in general do not respond to his emails or questions about other matters he has raised with them. The inquiry also raised with C2 the perception that he is making these complaints as the restructuring directly impacts C1 in losing her position with the municipality, which, for him (C2), is a conflict of interest due to their close personal relationship. It was also raised with C2 the historical harassment issues involving him against Mayor Fort. C2’s response was that, regardless of these other matters, he cannot be deprived of the law.

It was put directly to C2.

*Q. ... I’ve been told that you were rude, that you were being obstructive at the meeting, that you were warned a number of times to stop, and then finally you were kicked out. I’m told that you’re doing this basically to continue to harass the mayor and that it has to do with C1 losing her job at the municipality.*

C2 did not directly answer this question. Instead, he suggested the inquiry should cross-examine each of the councillors to see if he was rude. He also spoke of his unrelated complaints against the municipality, that he wanted to submit supplemental materials to the inquiry, and lamented the previous findings of harassment against him involving Mayor Fort.

During the interview with C2, C1 could be heard in the background. C2 called to C1 by name and had C1 research case law to send it to the inquiry.



## **Recording of Town Hall Meeting – September 17, 2025**

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The full town hall meeting from September 17, 2025, was recorded. The inquiry has reviewed this meeting in its entirety. At the beginning of the meeting, the Mayor announced that they had the OPP in attendance as special guests. She explained that the idea to have the OPP attend the town hall meeting was for the community to meet the officers. This came about based on engagement with the OPP to increase their presence in the community. Mayor Fort then introduced the officers to the community members in attendance.

Mayor Fort also put the expectation for everyone regarding their conduct on the screen. She explained that this event was a meeting of Council and that there could be debate as long as it was respectful. Mayor Fort also advised the audience that she would hold everyone to this standard, including Council and members of the public. She further explained that if someone behaved disrespectfully, she would issue one warning and depending on the severity, she would ask that individual to leave. If needed, she would also ask the police to escort the individual from the meeting.

On the screen behind Mayor Fort was one slide with information relating to the procedural bylaw on this issue. She did not read from it but had it on the screen, presumably for information purposes. One of the rules for those asking oral questions of Council was that they had two minutes to do so.

At 39:20 minutes into the meeting, C1 asked questions of Council. Her question was in writing and read out and answered by staff. It related to the closed session of Council from July 25, 2025. The second question related to financial reporting for the municipality. It could not be readily answered as staff did not feel there were adequate details in the question. C1 was invited to submit more details, and a response would be provided to her.

At 45:00 minutes, a question came from a member of the public not involved in this inquiry. Of interest to the inquiry is that staff reading out the questions indicated that the question would not be read out as it contravened the procedural bylaw and was derogatory towards Council. The person who submitted the question could be heard to say, "*Unbelievable. Waste of time*". Mayor Fort then invited this individual to change the language of the question and submit it to Council for consideration. She advised that if he put the question in a nicer way, she would answer it.

At 51:46 minutes, Mayor Fort called C2 to present his questions orally. She introduced the questions as "*pay grid and Municipal Act*." C2 started his question by warning the OPP officers present that if they planned on purchasing a home in Hornepayne, they should be wary of the residential tax rate. He then asked Council if anyone knew the tax rate. This question was taken by Mayor Fort, and she turned to Ms. Batovanja for the



answer. Ms. Batovanja replied that she did not know the precise rate; however, it is over 4 %. C2 then responded that it was 5.7%. C2 already knew the answer to the question he asked.

C2 turned again to the OPP members and said that if they purchased a house in Hornepayne, they were going to pay \$20,000.00 in taxes. Mayor Fort interjected. C2 shouted over Mayor Fort and continued. Mayor Fort raised her voice and called C2 by name and told him that he was supposed to be asking Council questions. C2 cut Mayor Fort off and was being very loud to the point of shouting at her. Mayor Fort then addressed C2's question herself. C2 then argued with Mayor Fort and continued to speak over her, being very loud, and stated to her, "...I suggest you guys tell the truth." As Mayor Fort tried to interject, C2 shouted over her, attempting to persist with his questions on this issue.

Even while C2 was being disruptive and very challenging in his very first question to Council, Mayor Fort had staff pause the timer for C2 while they attempted to address his points on the tax rate. Staff then provided C2 with detailed information on this issue.

At 54:51 minutes, C2 was back on the clock, and he moved on to pay grids and directly challenged the personal pay rate for Ms. Batovanja, saying she was undereducated, etc., for her pay rate. He then complained about the pay rate for the acting treasurer. Mayor Fort tried to interject, and C2 spoke over her in a loud voice. He continued in what was essentially a rant about the pay grids, and Mayor Fort again tried to interject. C2 continued to speak over Mayor Fort until she was able to ask him what his question on this issue was, as up until this point, there were no questions by C2 on this subject for Council to address.

C2 then questioned why Ms. Batovanja was paid at the rate she was. He also asked why they had to pay for someone who was inexperienced in the position. Mayor Fort then indicated she would answer the question. C2 then loudly and argumentatively asked Mayor Fort, "*Why do you get to answer?*"

Mayor Fort responded that she chairs the meetings, she is the mayor of the town, and it is her duty. She advised C2 in no uncertain words that this was how the meeting would proceed, whether "*you liked it or not.*" She told C2 to direct his questions to her, and she would direct them to the appropriate person for an answer. This question was then answered by Ms. Batovanja. Ms. Batovanja then explained her experience and education for the position. C2 continued to challenge Ms. Batovanja's pay rate.

Mayor Fort then explained the hiring process for the CAO position and the challenges they had. C2 continued to argue the issue. At 1 hour 2 minutes, C2 began to yell loudly over Mayor Fort. Mayor Fort attempted to stop him, and C2 told Mayor Fort not to cut him off when he was speaking. Mayor Fort attempted to regain control by telling C2 that she could cut him off and called C2 by name several times. He continued to yell over her,



saying that he has Charter of Rights, section 2. C2 continued to argue with Mayor Fort and yell over her. At 1:02:11, Mayor Fort told C2 to stop talking. C2 persisted in his behaviour.

At 1:02:24, Mayor Fort asked C2 to please sit down, or she would have to ask him to leave the meeting. C2 then stopped his behaviour.

At 1:35:26, C1 returned to ask questions about the deputy clerk, pay rates, education and so on. C1 was essentially asking why the municipality was paying for the deputy clerk's education instead of investing in the restructuring. These questions were addressed by Mayor Fort and Ms. Batovanja. C1 also asked if Council had voted in closed session to eliminate these positions as part of the restructuring. This question was improper and not answered by staff. C1 then asked if the organization restructuring was really a restructuring or about someone individually. Her questions and those of C2 were the same as several issues raised by C1 in her various complaint(s) about Mayor Fort, reported on here today. C1 was re-asking the same questions in a new venue about her own personal job loss at the municipality due to the restructuring.

The discussion on this issue with C1 continued for several minutes. She continued to ask the same questions that were in her complaint about Mayor Fort. Staff, including Mayor Fort, indulged the questions even though at certain points, C1 became argumentative, and it was clear she was asking questions about her own personal employment and release from the municipality. Mayor Fort interjected that they would get C1 a full answer and post it to the website.

At 02:02:20, C2 returned to the microphone for additional questions to Council. In this case, he was addressing issues that he framed under section 253 of the *Municipal Act*. For reference, this section deals with public access to records under the control of the municipal clerk.

C2 again went on about the municipal tax rate. He complained that Ms. Batovanja did not know the proper tax rate and questioned how they could have her leading the municipality based on false information.

*"Why did she not know this. It's very basic, basic accounting."*

Mayor Fort attempted to speak, and C2 spoke over her and continued to question why Ms. Batovanja did not know the answer.

Mayor Fort cut C2 off and told him that she runs the meeting and she will answer the question. As she was explaining that staff cannot know every last point being asked, C2 cut her off. He was loud and argumentative. He asked Mayor Fort and Council what the commercial tax rate was. He challenged Mayor Fort and Council,



*“Ok, Cheryl, what’s the commercial tax rate...you’ve been here for eight years...”  
(presumably referencing Mayor Fort’s tenure on Council).*

Mayor Fort attempted again to interject in C2 conduct. He then turned to Council at large;

At this point, C2 was argumentative and was being at best facetious with Council. He then mocked Council, saying;

*“...your guys are running the show, preaching all this stuff, all this money and that and glory days and sunshine to the world here, what’s the industrial tax rate?”*

Mayor Fort offered to get the information for C2, saying she did not know it off the top of her head. C2 replied that there are seven of them; one of them should know the answer. Mayor Fort told C2 that this was not a debate and that she would get him the answer. She also advised C2 that his conduct was edging into the Code of Conduct and that they did not know the answer, but they would get it for him. C2 then spoke over Mayor Fort at 2:04:19;

*“...I know the answer, I’ll tell you the answer, it’s 7.7 industrial rate and the commercial rate...”*

C2 continued to speak over Mayor Fort while she said his motivation for the questions was to make Council and staff look stupid, and that she was *“not going to have it”*. She then told C2 to sit down and that he was done speaking. C2 continued to argue and speak over Mayor Fort. Mayor Fort called him by name several times in an attempt to get him to stop. C2 was very argumentative at this point and shouting over Mayor Fort about his freedom of expression, charter or rights, etc. At 2:04:49, Mayor Fort said to C2,

*“You are being asked to leave right now. You can leave. I’m asking you right now, I am going to ask you once to leave the building, if you don’t, you will get escorted.”*

While Mayor Fort was telling C2 to leave the meeting, and before her statement ended, an OPP officer can be seen walking off camera towards C2. Mayor Fort did not ask the officer to do this. A second officer also approached C2, presumably to assist in removing C2 from the meeting. This was all done off-camera.

## **Interview of Mayor Fort – Town Hall Meeting - September 17, 2025**

Mayor Fort was interviewed for her perspectives on what occurred during the meeting.

Mayor Fort provided the inquiry that they hosted a Town Hall meeting on September 17, 2025. They try to do these annually. It gives the community an opportunity to interact with staff and ask questions of Council. These are submitted in advance in writing or



orally. There is a structure to the meetings to ensure one member does not monopolize the meeting. They had decided to host the town hall back in July 2025 to introduce the new CAO and also the new OPP officers that were being assigned to the community.

There were several questions throughout the meeting. Many dealt with the restructuring and the process of doing this. There were a few community members who raised questions about the restructuring, including C1 and C2.

C2 was asking about the municipal tax rate. He was being quite aggressive about it. He wanted to know why all of Council and staff members could not tell him the tax rate off the top of their heads. She was trying to explain to him that she did not see it as a problem not knowing the rate. Council focuses on the monetary increase per household. They want to know the actual impact and do not necessarily know the actual tax rate by percentage.

Ms. Batovanja was also new in the position. She was just hired about three months prior. Then C2 told the audience that he, in fact, already knew the answer to the question he was asking. Mayor Fort, at that point, believed that C2 was just trying to make it look like Council didn't know what they were doing. This is not true. They have a very engaged and active Council.

C2 was trying to control the meeting and direct who would answer the question. Mayor Fort indicated that as mayor, she is the spokesperson in the role and speaks on behalf of Council. It was a difficult meeting.

Mayor Fort advised that she asked C2 to stop talking and sit down. He would not listen or respond to her appropriately. She believes he was infringing on the Code of Conduct by being disparaging in his treatment of people at the meeting. Eventually, she told him that if he was not going to sit down and listen, she would have to ask him to leave the meeting. C2 did not comply with Mayor Fort's direction, and she asked him to leave the meeting.

The OPP officers in attendance got up and removed C2 from the meeting without her asking them to do this. Mayor Fort really just wanted C2 to sit down. C1 was there with him, and it was really uncomfortable as she had just been restructured. The police were not there as they expected issues. They were just there as they were invited to introduce them to the community.

In the moment, Mayor Fort thought she was following the process. It was a town hall meeting, and she thought of it as different from a regular Council meeting. They have discussed amending the procedural bylaw to address town hall meetings.



Mayor Fort submitted to the inquiry that even though there is a process within the procedural bylaw to remove someone from a meeting, it does not exclude her from her position from *asking* someone to leave the meeting.

Mayor Fort explained the personal impact of the complaints and conduct she has been experiencing from C1 and C2. She is dedicated to the municipality, and she is very thankful to have such a good Council. Being mayor and balancing a full-time career is difficult. Mayor Fort was emotional when explaining the impact of these matters, calling it traumatizing and saying that it has impacted her health and well-being in general.

The meeting on September 17, 2025, was the first time she had to speak with C2 since he had harassed her in the workplace. This time it was in a public forum. She had prepared herself for this moment. She tried to keep her tone level and not let C2 get under her skin. Then it was enough, and she had to do something about the behaviour. Mayor Fort felt that she was the one who had to protect Council and staff.

She called C2 out on already knowing the answer to the questions he was asking.

*“... you're just coming to make us look stupid. They (staff) don't deserve that...”*

Mayor Fort stated that she did not go to the meeting to remove someone. C2 got a lot of chances, and she likely could have removed him earlier from the meeting.

### **Text Message from C1 to Mayor Fort – December 30, 2025**

C1 texted Mayor Fort on her own on December 30, 2025. It was unexpected. C1 said she was putting out an olive branch. Mayor Fort thought this was just manipulative on C1's part, explaining that she has not done anything to either C1 or C2 to require an *“olive branch”*.

C1 then got upset in the text messages because Mayor Fort did not respond. The messages ended;

*“k, cool if you're ever your are not “afraid of me” or if it ever comes time my presence doesn't bring shivers down your spine or make “the hair on the back of your neck stand up” or “make you sick to your stomach” then she's got the eyes rolling emoji, I will be there as a friend.”*

Mayor Fort does not know why C1 sent her this text message. There were some protective measures put in place for Mayor Fort after C1 was found to have breached the OHSA in regard to Mayor Fort while in the workplace at the municipality; however, she is not sure if this is what C1's statements are related to. All of this is expending energy for staff and Council, it's expending taxpayers' costs.



## **Complaint February 27, 2026 – Restructuring**

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On February 27, 2026, C2 filed a complaint. The following is quoted from the complaint by C2;

*“This complaint concerns the actions take on or about July 29, 2025 respecting the restructuring and/or alteration of the statutory position of Treasurer for the Township of Hornepayne...it is my position that the restructuring or alteration of this statutory office **may have occurred** without compliance with required legislative and governance processes...” [emphasis added]*

This allegation is all about the termination of C1’s employment. In many ways, it is a refiling of the complaints made by C1 in her conflict of interest complaint. The inquiry also noted that the complaint offers no evidence at all to substantiate the allegations. The opening statement of the complaint acknowledges this lack of evidence when C2 stated the alleged misconduct “*may have occurred*”.

As will be explained later in this report, the inquiry has refused to investigate this complaint, as on its face, there is no evidence offered to support the allegations. This matter has been addressed in other complaints, and C2 is clearly a frivolous and vexatious complainant.

## **Review of Meeting, Minutes, Agendas & Declarations of Pecuniary Interest**

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The inquiry has reviewed 26 declarations of conflict of interest filed by Mayor Fort. They span from June 11, 2024, to November 2025. In reviewing these declarations, it is apparent that Mayor Fort repeatedly recused herself from personal matters involving her own employment and family-related items. She also recused herself many times for legal matters and discussions about the harassment complaint filed against her by C1.

The discussions about the restructuring of the municipality’s staffing, which led to C1’s termination, began after June 9, 2025, the date of Ms. Batovanja's appointment as CAO.

On June 25, 2025, the investigation into the harassment allegations against Mayor Fort. Shortly after this investigation was completed, the restructuring began, and C1’s employment was terminated on July 30, 2025.

Throughout this timeline and after, Mayor Fort declared a conflict of interest. C1 alleged in her complaint that Mayor Fort did not attend the July 23, 2025, Council meeting and then failed to file her declaration of conflict of interest at the next meeting on August 13, 2025, upon her return. This is true; however, Mayor Fort did file the declaration on September 10, 2025.



It was very apparent from the evidence that Mayor Fort was very diligent in ensuring the declarations of conflict of interest were made on the issues involving C1. She even made the final declarations after the conclusion of the harassment investigation, when it was no longer required.

### **Standard of Proof**

The test for making factual findings is whether the alleged conduct occurred on a “balance of probabilities”. This means determining whether it is more likely true than not that the alleged conduct occurred. This is a lower threshold than the criminal standard of proof of beyond a reasonable doubt.

### **Analysis: Conflict of Interest**

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The MCIA sets out the provincial law that governs the conduct of elected officials with respect to conflicts of interest. The following are the key sections pertinent to this matter;

#### **When present at a meeting at which matter considered**

**5** (1) Where a member, either on his or her own behalf or while acting for, by, with or through another, has any pecuniary interest, direct or indirect, in any matter and is present at a meeting of the Council or local board at which the matter is the subject of consideration, the member,

- (a) shall, prior to any consideration of the matter at the meeting, disclose the interest and the general nature thereof;
- (b) shall not take part in the discussion of, or vote on any question in respect of the matter; and
- (c) shall not attempt in any way whether before, during or after the meeting to influence the voting on any such question. R.S.O. 1990, c. M.50, s. 5 (1).

#### **When absent from meeting at which matter considered**

(3) Where the interest of a member has not been disclosed as required by subsection (1) by reason of the member’s absence from the meeting referred to therein, the member shall disclose the interest and otherwise comply with subsection (1) at the first meeting of the Council or local board, as the case may be, attended by the member after the meeting referred to in subsection (1).

#### **Written statement re disclosure**

**5.1** At a meeting at which a member discloses an interest under section 5, or as soon as possible afterwards, the member shall file a written statement of the interest and its



general nature with the clerk of the municipality or the secretary of the committee or local board, as the case may be.

## **Influence**

**5.2** (1) Where a member, either on his or her own behalf or while acting for, by, with or through another, has any pecuniary interest, direct or indirect, in any matter that is being considered by an officer or employee of the municipality or local board, or by a person or body to which the municipality or local board has delegated a power or duty, the member shall not use his or her office in any way to attempt to influence any decision or recommendation that results from consideration of the matter

The MCIA is clear that when an elected official has a pecuniary interest in a matter, they must recuse themselves from the discussion and declare their conflict in writing. They are also barred from attempting to influence the matter in which they have a pecuniary interest, even if they have declared this interest.

Pecuniary interest deals with some type of impact (positive or negative) on the members' financial situation. It could also be that it impacts the value of their assets. The actual pecuniary interest cannot be some type of remote possibility. It must be real and crystalized at the time of the failure to declare the conflict of interest or when the unlawful influence of a process occurs.

The municipality's Procedural Bylaw 2047 is consistent with this interpretation of pecuniary interest. Bylaw 2047;

*Pecuniary Interest" means a direct or indirect pecuniary (monetary) interest, in relation to the Municipal Conflict of Interest Act, R.S.O. 1990, c. M.50, as amended.*

The Code of Conduct for Members of Council and Local Boards Bylaw 1749 also governs the conduct of elected officials. It encompasses the principles of the MCIA and expands on them considerably. Only the portions relevant to this inquiry have been repeated in this report.

### **4.1.8 Conflict of Interest – Pecuniary Interest**

4.1.8.2 A conflict of interest exists when an individual is, or could be, influenced, or appear to be influenced by a personal interest, financial (pecuniary) or otherwise...can include direct or indirect pecuniary interest, bias, pre-judgement, close mindedness or undue influence.

4.1.8.3 ...when considering whether or not a conflict exists, it is important to consider where there are grounds for a reasonable person to think that a conflict exists.



4.1.8.4 ...those conflicts may not be only pecuniary in nature, it is generally advisable to be as open as possible. It is not enough that a conflict of interest not exist – it must also be seen by taxpayers to be non-existent.

The pecuniary interest alleged by C1 was described by her as Mayor Fort being able to avoid civil liability for her conduct during the course of the harassment investigation against her. She also alleged that by terminating her position with the municipality, it would allow Mayor Fort to have an unchecked ability to claim expenses to gain municipal funds. C1 also alleged that Mayor Fort influenced the restructuring plan that resulted in her termination from the municipality, thereby facilitating her (Mayor Fort's) pecuniary interest and the ultimate breach of the MCIA and the Code of Conduct.

Typically, the analysis for a conflict of interest under the MCIA or a Code of Conduct is twofold. First, the inquiry looks at whether or not there is a pecuniary interest. If there is reasonably one that can be articulated, the inquiry then looks at whether or not the respondent properly managed this conflict of interest by declaring the conflict where required and refraining from influencing the decision-making process.

With regard to the MCIA, C1 could not credibly articulate any meaningful pecuniary interest that Mayor Fort did or could have in the conduct she was alleging with regards to the MCIA. For example, it is nonsensical to assert that removing C1 from the workplace would in some way allow Mayor Fort the freedom to take advantage of municipal coffers. This notion is remote in the extreme.

With regard to the Code of Conduct, it is reasonable to assert that Mayor Fort had a conflict of interest in matters involving C1 while the harassment complaint against her was investigated. This is due to the broad language in the Code of Conduct. It defines pecuniary interest more than just a monetary interest. It includes;

*"...bias, pre-judgement, close-mindedness or undue influence."*

C1 failed to provide any evidence to support that Mayor Fort, in some way, influenced the restructuring that saw C1 terminated or that she involved herself in anyway in matters relating to C1. All of the evidence pointed to the opposite conduct by Mayor Fort. She recused herself repeatedly from meetings involving these issues; the restructuring did not occur until after the harassment investigation ended in Mayor Fort's favour, and most importantly, the restructuring was Ms. Batovanja's plan that she brought to the municipality on her hiring on June 9, 2025. C1 asserted a confluence of steps taken by Mayor Fort, going back many months, to influence C1's dismissal. The reality is that the idea of the restructuring was not Mayor Fort's, and that process began after June 9, 2025, weeks before the dismissal occurred.

CI is not a reliable or credible witness. She has failed to provide any evidence in support of her allegations. At best, the assertions she has made are based on her own conjecture,



rumours, and her own self-interest. Her complaint is clearly frivolous, and she is also clearly a vexatious complainant.

The allegation that Mayor Fort breached the Municipal Conflict of Interest Act or the Code of Conduct bylaw 2047 is **UNSUBSTANTIATED**. To be clear, it is not that there is a lack of sufficient evidence to support the allegations made by C1; the reality is that there is no evidence at all. This is why the inquiry ended with the interviews of C1 and Ms. Batovanja and the documentary review.

## **Analysis: Breach of Procedural Bylaw 2047 Town Hall September 17, 2025**

Bylaw 2047 is a procedural bylaw for the municipality that governs meetings of council. Although C2 has made numerous allegations under the Criminal Code of Canada and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms against Mayor Fort, it is the allegations under Bylaw 2047 that give jurisdiction to this inquiry.

The following is the relevant wording under Bylaw 2047. Only the portions relevant to this inquiry have been repeated in this report.

### **SECTION 4: CONDUCT AT MEETINGS**

#### **4.1 Role of Chair**

4.1.1 The Chair shall preside over Meetings so that its business can be carried out efficiently and effectively, and shall:

- (a) maintain order and preserve the decorum of the Meeting;
- (g) expel or exclude from the Meetings any person that breaches the rules of conduct set out in this By-Law, as necessary;
- (h) authenticate by signature, all applicable By-Laws, Resolutions, and Minutes;
- (k) without limiting the foregoing, preside over the Meeting fairly and objectively.

#### **4.3 Conduct of Members/Staff/Attendees**

4.3.1 No person shall:

- (a) disturb a Meeting by any disruptive or distracting conduct...
- (b) use belittling, derogatory, indecent, offensive or insulting words, profanity or unparliamentary language in or against Council or against any Member, Staff, guest, or individual;
- (g) display signs, placards, applaud, heckle, or engage in telephone or other conversation, or any behavior which may be considered disruptive.



4.3.3 No Member shall interrupt a Member who is speaking, except to raise a Point of Order or a Point of Privilege.

4.3.5 In the event that a Member of Council, Staff or an Attendee persists in breach of Subsection 4.3.1 above, after having been called to order by the Chair, the Chair shall, without debate, call the question "Shall the Council/Committee Member, Staff Member or Attendee be ordered to leave their seat for the duration of the Meeting?", and this question shall not be debatable.

4.3.6 If Council or a Committee decides the question set out in Subsection 4.3.5 above in the affirmative by a majority vote of the Members present, the Chair shall order the Council/Committee Member, Staff Member or Attendee to leave their seat for the duration of the Meeting.

4.3.8 If the Council/Committee Member, Staff Member or Attendee does not leave their seat after being ordered to do so by the Chair...then the Chair shall, for a second time without debate, call the question "Shall the Council/Committee Member, Staff Member or Attendee be ordered to leave their seat for the duration of the Meeting?", and this question shall not be debatable.

4.3.9 If Council decides the question set out in Subsection 4.3.8 above in the affirmative by a majority vote of the Members present, the Chair shall direct the Secretary to seek the appropriate assistance from the Ontario Provincial Police.

Also applicable to this event was the Trespass To Property Act of Ontario (TPA). The relevant sections are;

**1** (1) In this Act,

"occupier" includes,

- (a) a person who is in physical possession of premises, or
- (b) a person who has responsibility for and control over the condition of premises or the activities there carried on, or control over persons allowed to enter the premises,

**2** (1) Every person who is not acting under a right or authority conferred by law and who,

- (a) without the express permission of the occupier, the proof of which rests on the defendant,
  - (i) enters on premises when entry is prohibited under this Act, or
  - (ii) engages in an activity on premises when the activity is prohibited under this Act; or



(b) does not leave the premises immediately after he or she is directed to do so by the occupier of the premises or a person authorized by the occupier, is guilty of an offence and on conviction is liable to a fine of not more than \$10,000.

### **Method of giving notice**

**5** (1) A notice under this Act may be given,

(a) orally or in writing;

The allegation by C2 is that Mayor Fort breached Bylaw 2047 in how she had him removed from the town hall meeting on September 17, 2025. His evidence to the inquiry was that in his deposition before Council, he was not arguing or being confrontational at all. He further explained that Mayor Fort stated to him that he was making them look stupid and to get out. He alleged that Mayor Fort then told the police to throw him out, and they did. At the time, C2 was asking them if they knew the municipal tax rate; he asserted that Mayor Fort never warned him before throwing him out of the meeting. C2 was adamant that he was polite and that there was no reason for Mayor Fort to have him removed from the meeting.

Part of C2's complaint is that Mayor Fort only put a part of Bylaw 2047 on the screen and that she failed to display the mechanism to remove someone for bad behaviour. He complained that in doing this, Mayor Fort caused the police to take illegal actions against him, resulting in Mayor Fort committing a number of criminal offences.

In watching the video of the meeting, it is true that the screen behind Mayor Fort only displayed details on the prohibited activity for the meeting, but not the consequences of that conduct. This fact alone does not advance C2's complaint in any way.

The recording of the meeting permitted an unbiased review of everyone's conduct at the meeting on September 17, 2025. This has been described in detail in this report and does not need to be repeated. The inquiry finds that C2 misled the inquiry in how he characterized his behaviour on September 17, 2025. He was loud, argumentative, abrasive and very disruptive in his conduct. Mayor Fort was very patient with C2. Mayor Fort also had a duty to maintain the decorum and decency at this meeting of Council. It appeared C2 was disrupting the meeting and purposefully being antagonistic to Council, Ms. Batovanja and to Mayor Fort. It was very apparent that his intent was to embarrass and argue with Mayor Fort and Council.

The inquiry finds that C2's behaviour was very serious and that Mayor Fort had a duty to gain control of the meeting. By the time she asked C2 to leave, she had warned him at least twice and at the end of the exchange, she told C2 he was very close to breaching Bylaw 2074. The inquiry disagrees with Mayor Fort on this point. C2 should have been



ejected from the meeting prior to this point, as his conduct had already breached the rules of decorum repeatedly.

The inquiry finds that there were ample grounds to eject C2 from the meeting. The question is whether or not the proper process was followed in doing so. Bylaw 2074 required Mayor Fort to essentially call out C2's behaviour and ask for a vote from Council to remove C2 from the meeting. This step was not done. It was in the heat of the moment that was created by C2 that Mayor Fort asked C2 to leave.

C2 created the spectacle at the town hall meeting on September 17, 2025, that Mayor Fort had to respond to. He was very abusive to her, staff, and the rest of Council. It was while he was actively behaving in this manner that Mayor Fort ejected him from the meeting. The inquiry cannot find fault with how Mayor Fort acted. There is no reasonable expectation for her to accept this abuse for herself, staff or Council and at the same time be expected to put the matter to a vote to stop the abuse by C2.

The TPA also provides Mayor Fort with very clear powers as an occupier of property to remove or to have someone removed from the property. In this context, there are no steps required, such as under Bylaw 2074. Mayor Fort lawfully followed the TPA in asking C2 to leave the meeting.

The inquiry also notes that Mayor Fort asked C2 to leave the meeting. It is arguable that before she could take further action, the police in attendance took it upon themselves to remove C2. They were not directed to do so by Mayor Fort; however, they do have their own powers under the Criminal Code of Canada and their general duties as police officers to keep the peace. Ostensibly, this is what the police did, without a request from Mayor Fort. This negated the need for Mayor Fort to take any other steps under Bylaw 2074 or the TPA to affect C2's removal from the meeting.

The finding on the allegation that Mayor Fort breached Bylaw 2074 by not following the process to remove C2 from the town hall meeting on September 17, 2025, is **UNSUBSTANTIATED**. C2 was the architect of his own ejection from the meeting. Mayor Fort had the authority under the TPA to remove him, and the police interjected before she could have taken the next steps under the TPA or Bylaw 2074.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

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Mayor Fort has been the victim of an ongoing campaign of harassment and the weaponization of the complaint processes against her. The inquiry finds this conduct has been ongoing for several years and started in retaliation for C2's termination from his employment for harassing Mayor Fort.



Because Mayor Fort became an elected official, this gave C1 and C2 other avenues to challenge Mayor Fort that do not apply to the general public. These processes exist for good reason. They are key components of our democracy and provide a mechanism to hold elected officials to account. Unfortunately, these processes can be abused by the citizenry and cause significant personal harm to the individual targeted by malicious complainants. There is also a significant financial burden placed on the municipality for these investigations.

It is clear to the inquiry that C1 and C2 have collaborated in the filing of the complaints. It is apparent in C1's MCIA complaint that someone wrote a portion of it for her, and there is the fact that C1 was directed by C2 to send materials to the inquiry while being interviewed for this matter. C1 could be heard responding to these directions by C2.

There is also the fact that these complaints have a linear trajectory. They go from the finding and termination by C2 for harassing Mayor Fort at work, to the filing of various workplace complaints by C1 against Mayor Fort in 2024, to the filing by C1 of her MCIA complaint after her job loss from the municipality in July 2025, the collective conduct by C1 and mostly C2 at the September 17, 2025 Town Hall meeting and subsequent complaint filed by C2 on February 27, 2026. The inquiry finds that there is clear collusion between C1 and C2 in the filing of these complaints.

Code Conduct Bylaw 1749 Appendix "A" in section 3.2.0;

Vexatious means: instituted without sufficient grounds, serving only to cause annoyance to the defendant. Troublesome, annoying; a vexatious situation.

Frivolous means: little or no weight, or importance; not worthy of serious notice.

#### Refusal to Conduct Investigation

- a) If the Integrity Commissioner is of the opinion that the referral of a matter is frivolous or vexatious, or not made in good faith...the Integrity Commissioner shall not conduct an investigation, or where that becomes apparent in the course of an investigation, terminate the investigation.
- b) Complaints referred that are repetitious...vexatious...shall not be advanced to an investigation.
- c) Other than in exceptional circumstances, the Integrity Commissioner will not report to Council on any complaint described above.

The inquiry followed the process described above. When it came to the final complaints by C1 and C2 (conflict of interest, town hall meeting, and restructuring), these investigations were halted when it became apparent the allegations were without merit. The inquiry further finds that the complaints made by C1 and C2 with respect to these matters are frivolous and vexatious. They have been reported to Council as the inquiry



finds there are exceptional circumstances to do so. These circumstances are intended to publicly explain the attacks by C1 and C2 on Mayor Fort and their impact on the municipality as a whole.

The municipality owes a duty of care to its staff and elected officials. There is also a fiduciary responsibility in how they manage similar matters in the future. The following are recommendations by the inquiry to assist the municipality.

1. The municipality should consider taking measures to protect the staff and elected officials from a repeat of the conduct seen at the September 17, 2025, town hall meeting. The following are some suggestions to consider;
  - a) Assign a moderator for the meeting other than the mayor or other elected official. This will allow for triaging of the questions to ensure they comply with the Code of Conduct. It would then be up to the moderator to manage the conduct of participants instead of the elected officials.
  - b) Expand the use of written questions. Potentially only allow a topic to be opened by a written question, and oral questions only be allowed in the following dialogue.
  - c) Consider having participants sign into the meeting, and ensure that the sign-in includes an acknowledgment of the Code of Conduct for participants.
2. The municipality should develop strategies to prevent elected officials from being personally targeted by complainants and the weaponization of the complaint process.
3. The current Code of Conduct should be updated to include language on how to manage complainants who are deemed to be frivolous and/or vexatious. Once declared, considerations should be given to limit the ability of these individuals to file subsequent complaints with the municipality. This is similar to processes seen in the Ontario Courts of Justice.
4. The current multi-step process for removing a disruptive attendee from a meeting should be condensed. The mayor has statutory authority pursuant to s.225(b) to preside over Council meetings so that its business can be carried out efficiently and effectively. This grants the mayor the ability to remove persons where necessary. While a warning before removal is a best practice, depending on the severity of the behaviour, it may not be appropriate. The safety of staff, Council and the public attendees is of utmost importance, and constraints requiring voting on the issue, etc., may unduly delay ensuring safety.



## Appendix A – Credibility Assessments

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### Credibility and Reliability

To make findings, the inquiry had to assess the credibility and reliability of the parties. The credibility of a person's evidence differs from its reliability. *Credibility* relates to the sincerity and truthfulness of the witness. *Reliability* relates to the factual accuracy of the witness's testimony and the party's ability to accurately observe, recall and recount the events.

Someone can be credible (i.e., honest) but provide unreliable evidence. A person may be credible in certain respects but not others. But if they are not credible, their evidence cannot be reliable.

To assess credibility, we consider

- Whether or not the individual has firsthand knowledge of the situation
- Whether or not the individual had an opportunity to observe the events
- Whether or not the individual may have bias or other motive
- The individual's ability to clearly describe events
- Consistency within the story
- The attitude of the individual as they are participating
- Any admission of dishonesty<sup>1</sup>

Reliability can be impacted by factors such as whether someone is objective or may be biased in some way.

### Reliability and Perception

In assessing the reliability of the information provided, we considered not only what each party reported but also how their perceptions may have shaped those reports. People do not always interpret events neutrally; personal experiences, stress, and workplace dynamics can influence how actions are perceived and described.

In some instances, we observed a tendency to view others' actions as intentionally negative or personally directed, even when there were plausible explanations rooted in routine oversight or procedural requirements (*attribution error*). This pattern can affect the reliability of a person's interpretation, especially when similar intent is attributed across unrelated incidents.

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<sup>1</sup> *Faryna v. Chorny* (1951), [1952] 2 D.L.R. 354 (B.C.C.A.), at Para 10, 11. *Alberta (Department of Children and Youth Services) v. A.U.P.A.* (2009), 185 LAC (4<sup>th</sup>) 176 (Alta.Arb.)



With this in mind, we make findings of credibility and reliability for each of the parties below.

### **Witness – Ms. Manuela Batovanja**

Ms. Batovanja had a limited role in these matters. She joined the municipality in June 2025 and was the architect of the restructuring plan for the municipality. She provided documentary evidence regarding the restructuring plan. She also provided the inquiry with various documents, bylaws and other logistical assistance as needed. Her evidence was fully supported by Mayor Fort and the documentary evidence she provided to the inquiry.

Based on a balance of probabilities, the inquiry finds that Ms. Batovanja is both a credible and reliable witness and is prepared to accept her evidence.

### **Complainant #1**

C1 has made a series of complaints against Mayor Fort that culminated in the MCIA complaint. She is also in a longstanding personal relationship with C2, who was terminated from his employment regarding matters involving Mayor Fort. C1 herself has also lost her employment with the municipality and framed the MCIA complaint in the context of this job loss. With this backdrop against the making of these complaints, it is clear that both C1 and C2 have personal interests in the outcome of the inquiry and that they have worked with each other in filing the various complaints against Mayor Fort.

C1 asserted extensive allegations against Mayor Fort in these matters. Most notably, she alleged very serious conduct under the MCIA and Code of Conduct against Mayor Fort relating to her (C1's) termination from the municipality. When interviewed on the MCIA complaint, C1 could not provide any evidence to support the allegations she made. She had based her complaint on conjecture, rumour and her own interpretation of what *might* have occurred.

The fact that C1 was willing to file such baseless accusations and her own personal interests in these matters significantly impacts both her reliability and credibility as a witness. Based on a balance of probabilities, the inquiry finds that C1 is neither a credible nor a reliable witness. The inquiry is not prepared to accept evidence from C1 unless it is corroborated by another source.

The inquiry also finds that C1 filed a frivolous and vexatious complaint against Mayor Fort with regard to the MCIA/Code of Conduct complaint from August 29, 2025. This is based on the definitions found in the Code of Conduct Bylaw 1749. Her complaints were purposely made in bad faith to maliciously malign Mayor Fort. This was part of a long-term harassment of Mayor Fort done in concert with C2.



## **Complainant #2**

As explained above, C2 is in a close long-term personal relationship with C1. Matters involving C1 directly impact C2 and vice versa. It is clear from the evidence that C2 misled the inquiry in how he described his own conduct on September 17, 2025. He did not simply downplay his conduct; he was untruthful about it. C2 was antagonistic during this event and had very clear disdain for Mayor Fort and Council in general.

Due to C2's history with Mayor Fort, his untruthfulness with the inquiry and his clear personal motivations for this matter, the inquiry finds that based on a balance of probabilities, C2 is not a credible or reliable witness, and is not prepared to accept his evidence unless it is corroborated by another source.

The inquiry also finds that C2 filed a frivolous and vexatious complaint against Mayor Fort with regard to the Code of Conduct complaint arising from the town hall meeting on September 17, 2025, and against Council as a whole in his February 27, 2026, complaint. This is based on the definitions found in the Code of Conduct Bylaw 1749. His complaints were purposely made in bad faith to maliciously malign Mayor Fort. This was part of a long-term harassment of Mayor Fort done in concert with C1.

## **Respondent – Mayor Cheryl Fort**

Mayor Fort met with the inquiry on a number of occasions. She was very forthright in her evidence; she was calm and maintained an appropriate demeanour throughout. Mayor Fort did not attempt to disparage either C1 or C2 in any way other than to explain the personal impacts these matters were having on her.

Mayor Fort also provided detailed explanations to the inquiry about matters raised by the complainants. These explanations were then verified by Ms. Batovanja and extensive documentary evidence, such as the restructuring planning documents from Ms. Batovanja, meeting agendas/minutes and the notices that she had filed when declaring pecuniary conflicts of interest.

All of Mayor's Fort's key evidence was corroborated by another reliable source. None of her evidence was challenged in any way.

Based on a balance of probabilities, Mayor Fort is both a credible and reliable witness and the inquiry is prepared to accept her evidence.