

From: Don Seymour _____
Sent: Thursday, February 16, 2012 7:33 AM
To: Saunders, Cathy
Subject: Note to Council

Cathy, I sent this note to the Mayor and Council yesterday and it was suggested it be sent to you as well. Thank you.

Dear Mayor and Council:

I hope these comments are taken in the spirit in which they are intended – reflection and comment about the events of the past week specific to the budget and those who have voiced their opinions regarding the budget.

As a leader of a non-profit mental health organization it is sometimes hard to distinguish between what is my personal opinion and what is the voice of my organization. My passion and belief in my work and the people I serve are what drives me – personally and professionally.

I must admit a shiver went through me when I learned an elected official called the employer of a citizen who was voicing his passionate disagreement with your budgeting decisions related to affordable housing reserves. Whatever the rationale for this person calling his employer it causes those of us who exist at the hand of the taxpayer to take pause and wonder about our own voices.

Are we to remain silent so as not to cause harm to our organizations or careers? Should we not have an opinion because we may work for an entity that receives government funding? Are our rights as a citizens and taxpayers in London less than others because our organizations receive funding from the City of London? These are the questions I and many of my peers have been asking and pondering since last week.

Many of us work in organizations that support people who have no voice; persons with mental illness, the homeless and persons with disabilities. If you still our voices through threats and intimidation who will speak for these vulnerable people? It is our moral imperative to add our voice to the community debate. And sometimes this voice may disagree with the decisions you are empowered to make as our elected representatives.

As a former municipal councillor I understand more than most the difficulties you face in your job. I also know intimately the things you endure in your public service duties how they impact your personal and family life. For me after a four year term it was a cost I was no longer willing to pay. I admire your willingness to serve your community.

This debate regarding the budget and the desire to reach a zero percent tax increase is not going to go away. It will remain with our community for the rest of your term. It is a good debate. It forces us all to examine how public resources are used and how we can become more creative in preserving those things we believe essential to our community. There will be disagreement; passionate and sometimes vociferous disagreement – both in Council chambers and in the public arena. As we reflect on the events of the past week, hopefully this debate can continue without the perception of threats and intimidation to those who disagree – on both sides of the zero percent debate.

Respectfully,

Don Seymour,

Private Citizen and Executive Director of WOTCH Community Mental Health Services.

CC Ross Collishaw Chair, WOTCH Board of Trustees