

Re: 10.1 COR-2024-56 – Council-Staff Relations Policy
Delegation by Barry Wolfe, Baden, Nov. 25th, 2024

On July 5th, 2021 after the previous council had perfunctorily heard delegations about the PMP project's future, and then immediately ignored the input of 80% of that citizen input, and had the hubris to read from prepared scripts to rationalize their actions, I asked myself the question, "*How did it come to this? How does this corporation make decisions?*"

I started looking for possible answers by seeking information. I wanted to work within the system to be able to be an advocate for the Township and conclude, positively, that the decision of July 5th was an unfortunate exception in the democratic process of decision-making in Wilmot.

I reviewed council meeting minutes and reports starting back in 2016 when the Township signed a contract with Createscape. I asked for the documents produced by the Township to fulfill its requirement to provide an educational program acceptable to the public. **Request denied.**

I wondered how the organization was structured, who was responsible for what, who reported to whom, what are the structural checks-and-balances for accountability? Thus, I requested the consultant's report of recommendations for Wilmot's "*Organizational Structure Review and People Plan*". **Request denied.**

Staff presented a report recently advising us of the need to spend \$1Million to renovate this Castle to add exactly 11 more employees. I asked my ward councillor for a copy of the report. Second attempt. He said he had to ask permission. He had to ask permission to provide me with the information, which would be the logical rationale for adding exactly 11 more employees, and for telling citizens why they needed to contribute another million dollars. **Report denied.**

In fact, **my ward councillor does not have the "people plan"** which is presently being used to plan for additional staff and renovations. Council doesn't have the information being presently used by management to hire staff and renovate capital assets at public expense.

There's a pattern here. A lot of talk over time by senior managers about, "*transparency, timely respectful inclusive communication with our stakeholders, consistent collaborative community participation, public*

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engagement, public affirmation of our ‘marching orders’, trust building”, but no follow through.

Whoever controls information, controls knowledge. Whoever controls knowledge controls power. After 3 years of trying to get the answer to my question, “*How did it come to this?*” I have reached some conclusions about who controls the information, thus who controls the knowledge, and thus who controls the power in decision-making in this corporation.

The facts say that council does not have all the information required for it to fulfill its legislated requirement to provide supervision of the CAO role, and to “*ensure the accountability and transparency of the operations of the municipality*”.

That is on senior management, over many years. It’s an inappropriate *management culture* arising over time – and still exists.

That is also on Councils. Councils have sat passively by, allowing this upending of the hierarchy of authority in the OMA, allowing this power shift to develop.

Councils, over time, have been told what their role is, where they sit in the pecking order, by management, instead of council directing and supervising staff such that management was kept in line behind Council’s leadership. It’s an inappropriate culture, upending the authorities in the process of decision-making.

This proposed policy intends to codify, that that inappropriate culture of management acting way out in front of its skis is common practice. It is an attempt to legitimize the practice of overreaching its authority as regulated in the OMA, in a by-law. Defeat it. Why?

#1 This proposed policy, written by management, is superfluous. It’s not needed. Everything one needs to know is already in the OMA. Council just has to assert its authority, in practice, as is its duty. That is best practice.

#2 This proposed policy is in contradiction of the constructive and instructive findings recorded in the *Corporate Communications Strategy*, from Redbrick Consultants:

- a. Page 7, Key Themes, item 10: “**Belief that elected officials should be able to get information from all levels of staff, not just the department director, to save time and ensure efficient use of staff resources.**”
- b. Page 8, items 6 & 7 it is the belief of the hired lower-level staff, “. . . that the community is highly engaged. However, staff also indicated that they do not believe **residents receive enough information from the Township.** There is a mismatch between residents’ desire to engage and their level of knowledge about Township matters.” AND, “**Desire to rebuild community trust.**”
Senior management refuses to provide public information – this is a “will not” culture. > No trust.
- c. Page 9, stakeholder groups, item 6, “**The Township does not have a reputation for being helpful. A positive culture shift is needed.**”
- d. Page 15, Challenges, item 2, “**Council would like this work (communications resources) to move more quickly. They would also like to be better informed about upcoming staff reports and project status across departments.**”
No problem. Act. Just direct staff to do it!!!!
- e. Page 17, item 3, “**Establishing effective processes for Council to stay informed, including between Council meetings, is critical to success.**”
No problem. Act. Just direct staff to do it!!!!
- f. Page 18, item 6, “**Enhance public engagement efforts**”.

This policy proposal would codify, legitimize, that it is the role of a CAO, now and forever into the future, to run the corporation. Council becomes a sycophantic supplicant for information and thus can be kept under-informed, mis-informed or ignorant of the knowledge required to perform its duties - if a manager chooses. Council will only receive the information selectively released by a senior manager, at their unfettered discretion.

The corporation’s structure has the CAO role as the funnel through which all information flows up to council, down to staff. The CAO role has morphed from a funnel to a filter, and at times has become a cork. Information is filtered in that only ‘approved after consultation and approval from a boss’ may sanitized information flow. If this proposal is approved, it would give the role of CAO the authority to also control the flow outward from the corporation to the public. The mayor would no longer be the spokesperson for the corporation.

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In practice it would be the CAO's name and face that would be in local newspapers, and the mayor may or may not be mentioned in passing, as a 6th paragraph down insert.

It would become the role of a CAO which has the power. Anyone now and on into the future who sits in that chair, would wield that authority almost omnipotently.

What do we do?

#1 Recognize that, Citizens have high regard for most service levels in Wilmot: fire protection, parks, recreation, public facilities, most roads, for examples.

#2 Defeat this policy proposal because it is not needed, in fact it would be superfluous. All roles and duties are described already in the OMA, and this proposal does not align with the conclusions and recommendations in the Township's *Corporate Communications Strategy*. In fact, it is an example, I conclude, of unacceptable practice when weighed against the benchmark standards described in the Redbrick report.

#3 Identify and act.

What the community needs is:

- a. For Council to direct that Brett O'Reilly participate in meetings and be seated at this council table, at the end, near to the press box.
- b. For Council to direct that all management reports be first vetted through the office of the communications specialist as it is she who will provide the 'check-and-balance' within the corporation from a tactical and strategic perspective, ensuring that no longer will any reports be written by, reviewed by, and presented by only one individual.
- c. For council to direct that all senior management roles participate in a 'professional development' training regarding best practice communications, and development of a check-list of best practices against which all communications must be evaluated, just as all reports must align with the Strategic Plan. Council will undertake the same professional development training. These should be led by Redbrick Communications in cooperation with Brett O'Reilly. This would be a present investment that will pay astronomical future dividends.

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- d. For council to produce its own directive policy to ensure that it has the foundational information described above,
- e. For council to produce its own council meetings' agendas of items compliant with an efficient and effective planning calendar, and which address the interests and needs of its citizens,
- f. Recognize that, the CAO supervises all hired staff and must be aware of all activities, of all service areas as they are executed every day, of every month, and be able to provide direction and re-direction as needed to hired staff. He or she or they must have a comprehensive knowledge of what has happened, what is happening and what will be happening in the known future. Long-term planning to provide 30 years risk management planning also occurs in effective corporations.
- g. Because council supervises the CAO, **direct through a policy by-law**, that it is the role of a CAO to provide all of the same information, in f above, about every service area, for every week and every month. Council must have knowledge of what happened before they took office and will impact their current decision-making. Council must know what events are upcoming, when, for what reason, and for what projected cost. A CAO must provide that data to council when they first get elected to office and must continue to provide it regularly (not just quarterly or whenever they choose) and upon request of council. It's a policy by-law requiring compliance. Put it into all CAO and all senior administrators' contracts.
- h. For council to answer questions and concerns from citizens, based on their own judgements as elected officials, without necessarily seeking prior sanitized message approval from management staff,
- i. For citizens to be given information in the public domain upon request,
- j. For Council to hire an additional dedicated communications staff, now. This person would have responsibilities that include making the website user friendly and Google search engine compatible. **This includes an emphasis on SEO page identifiers, including 'Focus key phrases', 'SEO titles', 'Slugs', and especially 'Meta descriptions' that would, additionally, enable viewers to identify items which form 'the history' of the Township in the form of 'previous documents that have expired' and have been replaced with more current documents. The historic record is essential to**

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maintain to provide instruction to the present, but needs to be identified as such when landing on that page.

An example is a search for the strategic plan. There are multiple versions of the strategic plan that can be found. The most recent one is not there because the consultant has not yet reported back to council in public session his statistical data analysis of the demographic makeup of the public questionnaires' source data as he promised council. He commented in public session that he had the data, had reviewed the data, and found it very interesting. On that basis council requested that he provide it. He committed to providing it in a staff report. The public has yet to see and review it. A final draft of the S.P. is available, but the 'published' version awaits the consultant's reporting of demographic analysis to council and the public.

- k. No more, "*We need to do better.*" – (*starting later, maybe*). Act now!
- l. For all members of this corporation to recognize that the smartest people are not necessarily in the council chamber room, but rather are also on the other side of the barrier behind me - in the community – all 22,000+ of them. "Together – we are all better."

This revised script, substantially edited to fit within the arbitrary 7 minutes limit, will be submitted to the clerk for inclusion in this meetings' official minutes, along with the comprehensive script from which it was edited, and with my intended "Bacon Scrapin" story script (which I originally intended to read as a parable to entertain).

Be well, all.

Sincerely submitted,

Barry Wolfe,
Baden