

From: [Mike Rice](#)
To: [Jeff Bunn](#); [Kaitlin Bos](#)
Subject: Correspondence Re: Integrity Commissioner Report IC2023-01
Date: March 22, 2024 5:50:47 PM

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Greetings council and staff,

I'm writing about the Integrity Commissioner's report IC2023 - 01 and kindly request that the Clerk include this correspondence with the agenda for the March 25, 2024 council meeting.

I trust that this correspondence will be received with an increased degree of courtesy and diligence than my last email dated Friday, August 11, 2023. In that previous email, I talked about the township's punitive plans to forcibly expropriate a volunteer-organized community event without consent, undermining years of local independent volunteerism and community support.

This government intervention has now occurred shifting the burden of operating costs from previous free-will sponsorships and a nominal \$5 gate fee for adults - to Wilmot's taxpayers, irrespective of their attendance at future Canada Day events.

As mentioned in my earlier email I've been a resident of Wilmot since the early 80s, regularly attending local and regional Canada Day festivities with family. I served as a volunteer co-organizer for Canada Day in Wilmot from 2017 to 2022. It's been heartening to witness our grandchildren actively engaging in community service, including volunteering on Canada Day, twice alongside a Ward 4 council member who also attended the Indigenous-led Sunrise Ceremony with community members including my grandchildren.

In that same email, I initially wished the staff well in their research and report preparation, hoping for a responsible decision based on verifiable facts. However, my feelings are now mixed due to the third-party investigator's confirmation that neither staff nor council met the expected due diligence.

The findings from this independent investigation should bring much-needed factual clarity and reassurance to people who've volunteered, valued local corporate partners and all who've attended the inclusive family-friendly Canada Day in Wilmot event over the last 6 years.

Disappointingly the report often conflates two distinct events blurring both into one. Also, it implies ongoing entitlement for the "Traditional Organizational Participants" of the New Hamburg-only Canada Day event, even though it ceased to exist after Canada Day 2016. And only subtly touched on Canada Day in Wilmot launching in

2017 and being independently active ever since.

An assumption that one person can 'unilaterally' organize and run an in-person event of this scale or a complex multi-entertainer virtual live-streamed broadcast downplays the immense effort put in by volunteers and organizers. The Ward 3 council member, who was a previous sponsor and vendor through a former business, can confirm the significant effort put in by diligent volunteers and volunteer organizers. In contrast, the now Ward 3 council member has never asserted any rights or entitlements beyond the mutually agreed-upon promotional deliverables.

The report graciously offers definitions for specific terms or concepts relevant to the investigation. While not strictly necessary, it would have been helpful to plainly highlight the clear difference between a 'donor', who gives selflessly without expecting anything in return, and a 'sponsor', who provides financial support in exchange for promotional advantages. Misconceptions about these fundamental concepts are what led to assumptions of perpetual rights, benefits, or privileges without expiration.

Failing to take the initiative to lead in 2016 to prevent the demise of the New Hamburg-only Canada Day event, and subsequently withdrawing from all consultations after Canada Day in Wilmot 2018, does not support claims of perpetual entitlement - especially without a multi-year sponsorship agreement.

For example, a reasonable person who's taken public transit would recognize that once you leave your seat, the bus will continue, and other riders will fill that seat. In essence, the show must go on.

The report proves that the "current Canada Day committee" was itself excluded from Staff's initial outreach as directed in 'the Motion' and then confirms a Canada Day in Wilmot volunteer organizer was excluded from playing a role on the Task Force despite applying to be a member.

The report acknowledges the disapproval of adapting a pandemic-induced online virtual event into a heartfelt community art display, showcasing wooden maple leaves painted by local children and youth in June 2021. This display of community empathy, though perceived by some as 'arbitrary,' was particularly touching in the context of the discovery of 215 Indigenous children's remains at a former residential school site in British Columbia. Demonstrating empathy while adhering to pandemic mandates and gathering limits for events are far from arbitrary.

After engaging in dialogue with the local Indigenous community for the past few years, Indigenous youth volunteered as co-organizers with Canada Day in Wilmot for the first time in 2023, embracing its inclusive vision. Yet, a few weeks later the council supported a motion to advance the forced expropriation of a volunteer-organized community event without their consent.

The specific mention of 'June 2021' in this quote by a Ward 4 council member "in the spirit that this used to be a full Community event prior to 'June 2021'" and "from my

perspective this was truly a Township/Community event.” is troubling, as the date of ‘June 2021’ is when the remains of 215 Indigenous children being found was made public. This statement is in support of reverting to a ‘traditional’ Township/Community Canada Day event, where Indigenous inclusion and public neighbourly acts of compassion toward Indigenous neighbours are not present.

The report includes a quote taken out of context. It was in reference to what rights are included with sponsorship and vendor agreements as some assumed absolute entitlement ‘by virtue of their participation on the day of the event’ as sponsors or vendors. The report suggesting that this explanation is somehow proof of a lack of ‘willingness’ to be transparent is misleading. There was no documented refusal of any kind as has been widely suggested.

Relevant to this report, those who were provided full access to all available records on file from 2017 to the date and year the meeting noted include:

- 2022-2023 President of Optimist International on the morning of August 26, 2022, at the Wilmot Recreation Centre,
- A local business owner now Ward 3 council member on July 11, 2022, at 1 pm at an office in New Hamburg
- Plus, Wilmot Corporate Leadership Team members, the CAO, Clerk, Parks, Facilities and Recreation Services Director, and the Communications and Strategic Initiatives Manager on Oct 12, 2023 at 3 pm in the Swartzentruber Room at the Wilmot Township Offices.

It must be noted that the Corporation of the Township of Wilmot is a member of the New Hamburg Board of Trade, represented by a Ward 4 Council member. This is significant because both the Corporate Leadership Team and the highest-ranking member of Optimists International were provided full access to all records.

Like countless other local volunteers, I’ve unassumingly supported causes and initiatives in Wilmot by sharing my time, skills, and through financial support. Regardless of the frequency of involvement or degree of public acknowledgement around their specific contributions to community betterment, I admire volunteers.

Unfortunately, recent events have highlighted the fact that those who live and give back differently to the community are regarded as less worthy than some who prefer participating within a more traditional group framework.

While the Motion’s author advocated for cultivating youth volunteerism, the Canada Day Task Force excludes those under 18, depriving them of personal growth opportunities and the task force of valuable youth perspectives. Government taking control of an event intended to celebrate unity in such a divisive manner does not reflect well on this community nor does it bode well for future volunteerism locally.

Confidentiality, including agreements calling for nondisclosure in some cases, would be a requirement for serving on a council. For that reason, confirmation in this report that a Ward 4 council member has been actively disseminating specific confidential correspondence, not originally addressed to that council member, is highly concerning.

Regardless of any oversights I've already noted, or whether or not I agree with the report's professional determinations or recommendations, overall, this report appears to address many crucial facts and for that, I am grateful for the author's hard work.

Aside from the stereotype of being hockey fanatics quick to apologize even when not at fault, Canadians are known globally for their humility, honesty, inclusivity and acceptance, often regarded as some of the most polite, tactful, and peace-loving people.

Canada Day is a day filled with diverse celebrations, commemorating a moment when several independent provinces initially joined together to form a unified nation. Beyond the festivities in the spirit of unity, we also remember those who paved the way while recognizing with humility past injustices that got us here. If unity lies at the heart of Canada Day, then it becomes our duty to foster respect for all cultures that share this land.

Regards,
Mike Rice

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