

From: [PF-Mailbox-01](#)
To: [Norio, Ann-Marie](#); [Spratt, Jenna](#)
Subject: FW: Online Form - Enquiry from Region website
Date: Sunday, August 21, 2022 12:32:30 PM

From: Niagara Region Website
Sent: Sunday, 21 August 2022 12:32:18 (UTC-05:00) Eastern Time (US & Canada)
To: Clerks
Cc: webincoming
Subject: Online Form - Enquiry from Region website

Enquiry from Region website

To reply, copy the email address from below and put into 'To'. (if resident entered their email address)

name

Hank Beekhuis

phone

[REDACTED]

email

[REDACTED]

municipality

St. Catharines

subject

Section 13 of the Proposal to restrict Delegations

comments

Dear Mr. Chairman and Regional Councillors Re: Section 13 of the July 4th recommendations. I unfortunately have a prior commitment on August 25 and thus will be unable to speak to Regional Council regarding the above recommendations; therefore I am addressing you in writing. I just finished reading a book entitled "How Democracies Die." It is an interesting analysis by two professors from Harvard about the current threats to democracy in the US and around the world. I think it also has a lot of application at the local level, even if on a less drastic basis. Democracy can die suddenly by an attempted coup (as the Region's previous Council recently experienced)

by those seeking to take advantage, but it can also die much more slowly and surreptitiously by incremental bureaucratic changes that slowly remove the rights of ordinary citizens to be able to participate fully in the political process. Speaking to Regional Council and Committees is a right, not a privilege, and should not be easily removed. I have read both published articles as well as the actual proposal, and am very concerned that we are making it increasingly difficult for the public to interact with our elected leaders. There is an exceedingly fine line between protecting leaders from abuse and the muzzling of dissent from those that councillors and staff fear or disagree with. Disagreement, even vehement disagreement, is not abuse. I understand that social media can be hurtful and I have been the subject of that myself. Unfortunately, when you are in a public facing position in the current digital age, you have to tolerate a certain amount of negative attacks. I have no use for disrespect, bad language or threats of violence to our publicly elected leaders but at least one of the reasons that these instances occur is that citizens often do not feel truly listened to or respected, or that they are getting the whole story. It is fair to expect a delegate to be respectful, but we should in our responses be more focused on the deeper reasons as to why the person feels the way they do. Being met with silence and an apparent lack of curiosity by many is also not respectful. To throw out accusations regarding bad incidents that have occurred outside of a council meeting as justification for these changes is not appropriate. If someone actually suspects someone of throwing a brick or hurling abuse on social media, it should be reported to the police, not used to rewrite Regional delegation policy. There are a number of observations that I will share: a) A person who is asking to speak to Council cannot be vetted by staff, especially since it is often their reports that are the subject of the criticism. This places them in a direct conflict of interest. That is unfair on its face both to them and the presenter. You can only be muzzled by the body you are asking to speak to. The Chair currently has more than sufficient power to deal with situations of abuse of both language and process. b) What is the definition of abuse? It appears that for some abuse is expressing ideas or positions that you disagree with, and that definition is inaccurate and inappropriate. c) There are already so many limitations placed on delegations in terms of time limits, registration, documentation etc. Speaking to Council or a Committee of the whole is already very intimidating for most people. It is not easy and is not done frivolously. To add that delegations can be limited if there are already too many people saying the same thing is not fair. It may just indicate that there are a lot of people seriously concerned about it. That should not negate their right to speak. d) The Region is not the Provincial legislature and to make that comparison is disingenuous. The municipality is the closest level of government to the people and has direct taxing power, and should therefore be the most open to everyone. It is the only level of government that citizens have realistic access to and the one which most seriously affects their daily lives. e) Regional politicians ought to examine how they respond to dissent. Is the dissent actually frivolous or is there more substance to it? We expect our leaders to base their positions on evidence and facts which are presented in an unbiased fashion and

supported by a demonstrated need. It is fair that councillors engage and request the same detail from presenters, while also understanding that presenters do not have access to all the details or have the resources that Council does. Council should be prepared to explain itself. f) When councillors engage on social media, citizens do deserve honest answers and accountability. I would point to our MPP Chris Bittle's social media feed as a positive example. g) Disagreement ought to be met with respectful dialogue and the sharing of facts and evidence, including discussion of the assumptions underlying them. It is only through open dialogue that reasonable individuals can come to understanding. When everyone feels heard then we can all feel more confident when the majority rule principle is used to make a decision. In the end , you never know what good things you can learn from each other, and as any good leadership course will tell you, a decision reached by the broadest consensus is always better than one made by one party. We are always better when we work together. Thank you for listening and please reconsider the need for additional restrictions. Sincerely
Hank Beekhuis [REDACTED] St. Catharines

reply
yes

Page Referrer

<https://www.niagararegion.ca/government/council/writtenletter.aspx>

