

Report on an Inquiry Respecting the Conduct of Councillor Plante

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Integrity Commissioner

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Executive Summary

Commissioner's Mandate

As Integrity Commissioner for the City of Ottawa, I am responsible for the application of the Code of Conduct for Members of Council, which includes receiving and investigating complaints about whether a Member of Council has contravened the Code of Conduct. In this case, I received several formal complaints regarding the conduct of Councillor Plante in respect of her online social media activity.

Following an intake analysis, confirmation of my jurisdiction to investigate and submissions from the parties, I initiated an investigation under subsection 9(2) of the Complaint Protocol into the formal complaints. This report is prepared pursuant to Section 11 of the Complaint Protocol and contains the findings and conclusions of my investigation.

Code of Conduct for Members of Council

The Code of Conduct for Members of Council (Code of Conduct) sets the standards of behaviour expected of Members of Council. The Code of Conduct came into force on July 1, 2013, and was amended as recently as January 2025.

Members of Council have an obligation to uphold the values and rules set out in the Code of Conduct.

The complaints

I received the formal complaints between November 12 and December 5, 2024.

The allegations set out in the formal complaints were similar in nature. Each complainant alleged that, within the context of a public debate on Sprung Structures, Councillor Plante engaged in online harassment and intimidation of residents and community stakeholders. Some of the complaints further alleged Councillor Plante had disclosed personal information and made false accusations about members of the public.

All the formal complaints alleged that Councillor Plante's conduct was in breach of Section 7 (Discrimination and Harassment) of the Code of Conduct.

Investigation

Following an intake analysis of each formal complaint, I determined the complaints were within my jurisdiction to investigate and there were sufficient grounds to initiate an inquiry. Copies of the complaints and supporting documentation were provided to the Respondent on December 18, 2024, with a request for a written response by January 7, 2025.

In her response to the formal complaints, the Respondent affirmed that it was never her intention to abuse, bully, or intimidate anyone, and that her social media posts were intended to reflect good faith discourse of important community issues. She acknowledged that her social media posts were sometimes direct, but maintained they were never abusive nor intimidating.

Councillor Plante also advised that she had proactively deleted the social media posts identified in the formal complaints and expressed an interest in meeting with the complainants to resolve their complaints through an informal resolution. On January 27, 2025, the request for an informal process was shared with the complainants. All the complainants declined the offer to participate.

Accordingly, I considered the information before me and determined that further investigation was required. Given the overlapping nature of the formal complaints, I exercised my discretion to conduct one investigation. As authorized under Section 223.3(3) of the *Municipal Act, 2001*, I delegated my authority to conduct the investigation, including conducting interviews and reviewing documentary evidence, to an independent investigator.

On February 3, 2025, all parties were advised that the matter was moving forward. The Investigator conducted interviews between March 12, 2025, and April 10, 2025. The investigation also included a review of social media posts, an ATIP disclosure package and e-mail correspondence. In his final report, the Investigator made factual findings on a balance of probabilities about whether the allegations were substantiated.

In preparing my report, I reviewed the Investigator's report, the recorded interviews and the documentary evidence collected. I conducted my own review of the Investigator's conclusions to determine whether I accepted the factual findings and analysis, and then determined whether there had been a breach of the Code of Conduct.

On July 8, 2025, the Respondent was provided the opportunity to provide comments on a draft of this report.

Summary of findings

The investigation considered whether the Respondent (Councillor Plante) contravened Section 7 (Discrimination and Harassment) of the Code of Conduct.

Having completed the investigation, I conclude that the allegations, in part, were substantiated and find, on a balance of probabilities, that the Respondent contravened the Code of Conduct.

Inquiry Process

The complaints

The formal complaints concern social media posts made by the Respondent within the context of a public debate on Sprung Structures. The social media posts are largely directed at or make references to members of the public and community leaders.

The investigation considered whether the Respondent's conduct contravened Section 7 (Discrimination and Harassment) of the Code of Conduct.

I have summarized the alleged misconduct set out in the formal complaints as follows:

1. The Respondent inappropriately disclosed personal information about residents, including posting screenshots from emails and private Facebook pages.
2. The Respondent engaged in harassment and intimidation of residents and community leaders on social media by making (in some cases repeatedly) accusations, inferences and disparaging *ad hominem*¹ remarks about community leaders who were opposed to a Sprung Structure in Barrhaven.

The complaints further state that the alleged misconduct resulted in:

1. Online harassment from other social media users; and
2. Interference with residents' ability to exercise their right to freedom of expression and to hold the municipal government to account, and had a chilling effect on the participation of other citizens in the public debate.

Response to the allegations

The Complaint Protocol sets out the process for receiving, investigating and reporting on formal complaints.

As part of this process, I provided Councillor Plante, who is the Respondent, with a copy of the formal complaints and a request for her written response to the allegations. This step provides respondents with the initial opportunity to respond substantively to the allegations set out in a formal complaint and to provide relevant information, background, and documentation. I received Councillor Plante's response on January 7, 2025.

¹ The Merriam-Webster definition of *ad hominem* includes: "marked by or being an attack on an opponent's character rather than by an answer to the contentions made". (Definition of *ad hominem* (adjective) in Merriam-Webster online dictionary <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ad%20hominem#dictionary-entry-1>) The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines the term as "directed against a person's character rather than their argument." (The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/ad-hominem?q=ad+hominem>) (accessed June 12, 2025).

In her response to the allegations, Councillor Plante noted the formal complaints concerned her social media comments pertaining to the possible placement of a Sprung Structure in Barrhaven, which was an issue that divided residents and resulted in significant public debate.

Councillor Plante indicated that she strongly supported the City's efforts to find appropriate locations for a Sprung Structure and disagreed with the positions being taken by prominent community members who were organizing opposition to the Sprung Structure. Councillor Plante believed at least some participants in the public debate were motivated by improper considerations.

Councillor Plante affirmed that it was never her intention to abuse, bully, or intimidate anyone, and she did not believe any of her social media posts did so. Rather, the Councillor argued her social media posts were always intended to reflect good faith discourse of important issues within the community. Councillor Plante acknowledged that her social media posts were sometimes direct, but maintained they were never abusive nor intimidating.

In addition to her response to the specific allegations, Councillor Plante provided a copy of an email communication to representatives of the Barrhaven Business Improvement Association (BBIA) and a copy of a BBIA Access to Information and Privacy (ATIP) disclosure package which she indicated she received from the original requester on September 13, 2024.

In concluding her response to the formal complaints, Councillor Plante indicated that she voluntarily deleted the social media posts identified in the formal complaints.²

Councillor Plante further expressed an openness to meeting with the complainants to discuss the issues in an attempt to resolve them. I confirmed Councillor Plante was formally requesting an informal resolution to the formal complaints under Section 8 of the Formal Complaint Procedures set out in the Complaint Protocol, which reads as follows:

Opportunities for Resolution

8. Following receipt and review of a formal complaint, or at any time during the investigation, where the Integrity Commissioner believes that an opportunity to resolve the matter may be successfully pursued without a formal investigation, and both the complainant and the Member agree, efforts may be pursued to achieve an informal resolution.

² While some of the social media posts referred to in the formal complaints were deleted, as of July 7, 2025, several social media posts identified in the formal complaints remained visible online.

The Informal Complaint Procedure is a process that aims to resolve grievances through dialogue, as opposed to a finding of a breach of the Code of Conduct through a formal investigation.

In the event that both parties agree to engage in the informal process, I may act as a mediator to facilitate communication between complainants and respondents.

The outcome of the informal complaint process depends entirely on the willingness of both parties to participate in an informal process/discussion. I cannot compel either party to participate or take any particular action.

On January 27, 2025, the request for an informal process was shared with the complainants. All the complainants declined to participate in the informal process, expressing reluctance and apprehension about engaging with Councillor Plante following her social media posts. On February 3, 2025, I notified the Respondent that all the complainants had declined to participate in the informal process.

Investigation

Turning back to the Formal Complaint Procedure, I reviewed the information provided by the parties and determined that the matter required further investigation.

On February 3, 2025, I advised all parties that I was proceeding to the next stage of the inquiry. Given the overlapping nature of the formal complaints, I exercised my discretion to conduct one investigation.

As authorized under Section 223.3(3) of the *Municipal Act, 2001*, I delegated my authority to conduct the investigation, including conducting interviews and reviewing documentary evidence, to an independent investigator.

The Investigator conducted interviews between March 12 - April 10, 2025 and the investigation included a review of social media posts, the ATIP disclosure package and e-mail correspondence.

I reviewed the Investigator's report, the recorded interviews and the documentary evidence collected and prepared my draft report. I conducted my own review of the Investigator's conclusions to determine whether I accepted the factual findings and analysis. In doing so, I requested additional confirmation from the Respondent on specific questions related to the facts and conducted brief interviews with additional witnesses to corroborate the Respondent's supplementary evidence. I then considered all the information in its totality and determined whether Councillor Plante's conduct was in breach of the Code of Conduct.

In accordance with the Complaint Protocol, on July 8, 2025, I provided Councillor Plante with a copy of my draft report and invited her to provide comments on the draft report within five business days. Councillor Plante, through her legal counsel, provided a

response to the draft final report on July 15, 2025. I conducted a thorough review of the letter and took into consideration all matters raised therein in finalizing my report.

The Respondent's response raised a number of issues, including the following:

- That the draft report erred by not analyzing Councillor Plante's posts on a post-by-post, or complaint-by-complaint, basis.

As the allegations were similar in nature, pertaining to the Respondent's online engagement in social media posts related to the public debate on Sprung Structures, I considered the conduct as a whole. With that said, I carefully considered each allegation set out in each complaint, and each specific instance of online engagement cited in the complaints.

Overall, the findings relate to a course of conduct observed over a series of Councillor Plante's social media posts. As a whole, the Respondent's posts demonstrated a pattern of disrespectful engagement with the witnesses.³ I determined there to be a pattern because, as detailed in this report, there were several instances of the Respondent's disrespectful communication over a period of time. This report cites a number of examples of those communications.

I considered the context and content of all the social media posts. Further, I am not required to present my analysis in a particular way. For these reasons, this report does not engage in a post-by-post or complaint-by-complaint analysis but rather presents the analysis in a manner that reflects the totality of the communications, including the words used and the inferences drawn from them.

Notably, the recent Divisional Court decision *Jubenville v. Chatham-Kent (Municipality)* upheld the municipal Integrity Commissioner's findings that a member of council's social media posts breached the municipality's Code of Conduct as the Member abused, bullied, and intimidated members of Council and the complainants. That Integrity Commissioner's 2023 report did not engage in a post-by-post analysis of the Member's posts that were the subject of the inquiry, instead highlighting some of the particularly troubling ones.⁴

- Procedural issues relating to: (1) two specific communications which the Respondent submitted went beyond the scope of the original complaints and notices of inquiry and (2) the limited time provided to review the draft report.

I take the first procedural issue raised quite seriously as it is a fundamental principle of procedural fairness that the Respondent has a right to notice of the allegations

³ I note the findings indicate the Respondent's social media posts themselves repeatedly referenced the connections between the witnesses and implied their collective involvement in nefarious activity.

⁴ *Jubenville v. Chatham-Kent (Municipality)*, 2025 ONSC 3598.

and an opportunity to respond. I confirmed the two communications cited in Councillor Plante's response were included in documentation provided to her along with the notices of inquiry. As a result, I believe Councillor Plante had sufficient opportunity to respond to those matters. Nonetheless, I offered Councillor Plante an additional five business days to provide any further submissions or comments in respect of communications referenced in the draft report that Councillor Plante believed she had not had the opportunity to respond to. The Respondent's legal counsel provided a supplementary response on July 23, 2025, which I considered in finalizing my report.

In respect of the second procedural issue, the response noted the "limited time available to respond to the draft report". I confirm five business days were allotted to the Respondent to respond to the draft report, as set out in Section 11(2) of the Complaint Protocol. That said, as described above, I offered the Respondent an additional five business days to provide any further submissions or comments.

- The Respondent's supplemental reply of July 23, 2025 commented that the draft report should not comment on the "truth or falsity" of political speech by Councillor Plante.

There are many examples of integrity commissioners considering whether comments made by Members were false or misleading when applying the local municipal Codes of Conduct.⁵ The Respondent refers to one integrity commissioner who repeatedly expresses that "political speech by its nature, consists primarily of opinion, with fact cited to justify the opinion". Based on this view, he suggests that municipalities consider whether Codes should extend to regulate truth in political speech and whether an integrity commissioner is able to police the truth of political speech.⁶

Code provisions, including those in Ottawa, do at times require an integrity commissioner to consider the accuracy of statements made by a Member, even related to matters of debate before council. Members are required to treat members of the public with "respect" which includes prohibiting Members from presenting misleading or false information as "fact" or using their platform to mislead by stating unsupportable opinions.

As described in detail in the "Analysis" section of this report, neither is the Councillor's participation in the debate nor the overall position which she expressed

⁵ See for example, *Jubenville v. Chatham-Kent (Municipality)*, 2025 ONSC 3598 (Div Ct); *Horsfield v Inch*, 2023 ONMIC 2 (CanLII), <<https://canlii.ca/t/k0w73>>

⁶ *Montforts v Brown*, 2021 ONMIC 10 (CanLII), <<https://canlii.ca/t/jjj69>>, at paras. 125-137. Despite expressing those views, in *Montforts*, the Integrity Commissioner did apply the language of the Code and determined whether certain social media statements were false or misleading.

at issue. Rather, at issue is the alleged disrespectful manner of that engagement and her attempts to discredit others who took a different view of the merits of Sprung Structures in Barrhaven. Personal attacks are not permitted under the Code as they are disrespectful and may amount to abuse, bullying, or intimidation.

- Both the Respondent's July 15, 2025 response to the draft report and her supplemental reply of July 23, 2025 refer to considerations that might "cause the Integrity Commissioner to reconsider" findings made in the draft report.

While I have reviewed and considered the Respondent's comments, they have not altered my findings. I confirm the Complaint Protocol includes the opportunity to comment on the draft report as set out in the Complaint Protocol. It is not a reconsideration of a final decision. However, submissions on a draft report may, for example, identify a factual error which may affect the findings. In this case, the submissions did not do so.

The Respondent disagreed with several of my other findings and determinations. However, as they are already addressed in this report, I do not address separately here. These include that the draft report did not give sufficient consideration to freedom of expression as it relates to the Respondent's engagement in political debate. As set out in the "Analysis/ Freedom of Expression" section of this report, consideration of this matter is central to my analysis.

Finally, I included additional comments in the body and footnotes of this report to address other matters raised in the Respondent's response to the draft report.

Duty of confidentiality

As a municipal Integrity Commissioner, I am bound by a duty of confidentiality set out in Section 223.5 of the *Municipal Act, 2001* as follows:

Duty of confidentiality

223.5 (1) The Commissioner and every person acting under the instructions of the Commissioner shall preserve secrecy with respect to all matters that come to his or her knowledge in the course of his or her duties under this Part.

In preparing this report, I am mindful of subsection 223.6(2) of the *Municipal Act, 2001* which provides that I may, "disclose in the report such matters as in the Commissioner's opinion are necessary for the purposes of the report."⁷ In making their complaints, more than one complainant expressed hesitation about filing a complaint and requested that their identities not be disclosed. I determined it is not necessary to disclose the names of those who participated in the investigation in order to explain my findings. I exercised my discretion to remove names of those who participated in the investigation from this

⁷ [Subsection 223.6 \(2\)](#) of the *Municipal Act, 2001*.

report. However, I am cognizant that this report deals with publicly available social media posts and the identities of the individuals involved may be discovered.

Findings

Background

The formal complaints concern social media posts Councillor Plante posted as part of an online public debate concerning the potential siting of a Sprung Structure in Barrhaven. The following background summary is based on information in City staff reports and memos and reflects the situation at the time when the alleged misconduct took place.

At the time, the City of Ottawa was working to create temporary and permanent accommodation for an influx of asylum seekers and refugee claimants arriving in the City. As part of these efforts, the City of Ottawa sought to implement a newcomer reception system which would see the City partner with relevant community and social service agencies to provide tailored supports for single asylum seekers and migrants.

The City's plan involved a multi-pronged approach which included purpose-built reception and lodging centres, followed by relocation to community-based transitional or permanent housing. Implementation of the plan included ongoing efforts to secure and convert existing facilities and purchase homes within communities to be used as transitional housing, and the construction of semi-permanent structures (Sprung Structures) that would serve as reception centres.

The reception centres (Sprung Structures) were intended to accommodate newcomers, some of whom the City was housing in recreational facilities serving as emergency overflow centres. One of the occupied recreational facilities is located in Ward 12, Rideau-Vanier.

Over the course of several months, City staff identified and evaluated parcels of land to determine potential sites for a Sprung Structure. In her response to the complaints, Councillor Plante indicated that in May and June 2024, many Members of Council were briefed on the possibility of placing a Sprung Structure in their ward.

On July 10, 2024, City Council considered an update on the City's Integrated Transition to Housing Strategy. The staff report confirmed that three City-owned land parcels had been shortlisted for potential newcomer reception centres in the form of Sprung Structures. A motion was brought forward to lift staff's delegated authority to pursue Sprung Structures as part of the strategy and instead focus on other permanent or semi-permanent housing solutions. After a debate, the motion lost, and the staff report was received for information.

Around this time, details of potential sites became public. Various media articles on July 16, 2024 refer to shortlisted sites in Barrhaven, Alta Vista and Orleans. In a July 19, 2024 Facebook post, the Barrhaven Business Improvement Association (BBIA) announced that “Central Barrhaven” had been short-listed as one of the potential sites. As Councillor Plante noted in her response to the complaints, the issue was divisive and generated considerable opposition from the community.

Beginning in July and continuing into the Fall 2024, an online public debate on the issue took place on social media platforms including X (formerly Twitter) and Reddit. The complaints concern Councillor Plante’s social media posts within this online public debate directed at or mentioning specific members of the public and community leaders.

The formal complaints cite approximately 30 social media posts. The majority of the social media posts are directed at or refer to the following individuals:

- Witness 1 is a member of the public who was involved with a grassroots community group called Barrhaven Residents Against Sprung Structures (BRASS). Witness 1 previously worked for elected officials at various levels of government, including Witness 3.
- Witness 2 is a member of the public who previously worked for Witness 3 for almost two decades while Witness 3 was an elected official.
- Witness 3 is a member of the public who served as an elected official for over 20 years.
- Witness 4 is a member of the public, a business owner in Barrhaven, and a member of the BBIA.

Timeline

The following is a timeline of the context and social media activity as established by the formal complaints, the Respondent’s response, the interviews with witnesses and the Respondent, and a review of the social media posts on the relevant platforms within the context of the public debate on Sprung Structures.

July 25, 2024

A member of the public (a well-known local media personality) posted about the Sprung Structure issue on the social media platform X (formerly Twitter).

Witness 4 was one of the X users who responded to the post and made comments about the proposed uses of the Sprung Structure. The Respondent was among the X users who responded to Witness 4’s post. The Respondent both challenged Witness 4’s statements about the proposed uses and attempted to provide clarification to the issue.

In one of her posts, the Respondent quote tweeted (i.e. retweeted with comment) Witness 4's post along with a meme⁸ depicting a male character entering a room with the words: "Behold a man has arrived to share his manly view".

Witness 4 indicated that he was offended by the meme and found it to be pejorative, inappropriate and harassing. In her interview, Councillor Plante said the meme was intended to convey someone who was commenting beyond their knowledge and that Witness 4 was incorrect about the proposed uses of the Sprung Structure.

A back and forth between the Respondent and Witness 4 continued where both parties shared opinions and arguments reflecting their position on the issue.

In addition to making her arguments, the Respondent shared a link to the July 10th Council debate on Sprung Structures, provided a link to information about Sprung Structures and offered to discuss the matter further with Witness 4 offline.

As part of one response, the Respondent suggested to Witness 4 that Witness 3 and Witness 3's family member (who is affiliated with the BBIA) may not be the best source of information on the issue, though neither Witness 3 nor her family member had been mentioned in earlier comments. Witness 4 later mentioned Witness 3's family member in respect of the BBIA's engagement with the Sprung Structure issue, but did not make a connection to Witness 3.

Both Witness 4 and the Respondent engaged with other X users who commented on the original post, which sometimes led to engaging with each other again.

Later that day, Councillor Plante emailed Witness 4 and the BBIA Executive Director to suggest they meet to discuss community shelters and the integration of refugees into a community. In his interview, Witness 4 indicated he was unavailable at the time, but he did not feel the need to engage with the Respondent in this discussion. He said he felt this way because of the tone of the meme and the fact that the local Ward Councillors were engaged on the Sprung Structure matter. The meeting did not take place.

October 8 and 11, 2024

As opposition to a Sprung Structure in Barrhaven continued to build, the local MPP became publicly engaged on the matter and posted about the issue on Facebook. One post included a "mini documentary" on Sprung Structures. Another post included a link to a post by Witness 1 which circulated a petition expressing opposition to the Sprung Structure. In both Facebook posts, the local MPP tagged Witness 1, Witness 3, Witness 3's family member, and Witness 4.

⁸ An amusing or interesting item (such as a captioned picture or video) or genre of items that is spread widely online especially through social media. "Meme." Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/meme>. Accessed 20 Jun. 2025.

October 25, 2024

The local MPP hosted a webinar on the Sprung Structure issue with a panel which included the provincial minister for Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development and a few local business owners who were also Barrhaven community members. Witness 4 took part in the webinar and was introduced as a Barrhaven resident who is a local business owner and affiliated with the BBIA. Part way into the webinar, the local MPP noted that the Respondent had joined the webinar and commented that the Respondent had been opposed to the Barrhaven community asking for their voice to be heard at City Hall. The local MPP then turned the webinar over to Witness 4, who introduced himself and commented about his involvement in the public debate and efforts to obtain information from the City. He further commented about being attacked on social media, including the use of memes.

November 5, 2024

Rallies opposing the proposal to place a Sprung Structure in Barrhaven were held on November 3 and 5, 2024. On November 5, 2024, a local radio station covered the community opposition to a Sprung Structure in Barrhaven. Witness 4 was interviewed about why the community was opposed to the proposal. The interviewer noted that Witness 4 is a Barrhaven resident, affiliated with the BBIA and a local business owner.

November 7, 2024

The Respondent tweeted about the local radio interview with Witness 4. The Respondent's tweet challenged comments Witness 4 made in the interview related to supports and services for the reception centre, shared information about the services provided to asylum seekers housed in community centres at the time and provided a link to the radio interview.

In a response to one X user who commented on her original post, the Respondent stated, "[Witness 4] knows exactly what he is doing. The problem is that he's doing it on the company dime AND has wrong information. BTW, I did reach out to the Barrhaven BIA many months ago to see if they would have a sit-down to discuss this off-line and they never responded."

Later that day, City staff issued a memo announcing two sites selected for a Sprung Structure and providing details of staff's process to identify and evaluate parcels of land suitable for the development of a newcomer welcome and reception centre. The Barrhaven location was not one of the selected sites.

November 8 - 10, 2024

The local MPP engaged in the public debate on X, responding to the City's announcement.⁹ The Respondent reacted to the local MPP's post and engaged in a back and forth with the local MPP.

The Respondent's first response was a quote tweet of the local MPP's post regarding her position on the City's announcement of the site for a Sprung Structure and read as follows:

"Really curious how [Witness 4] and the Barrhaven BIA will handle this.

'bUt wE dOn'T hAvE sErviCes!'"

[post included the local MPP's tweet]

The exchange between the local MPP and the Respondent continued with the local MPP challenging the Respondent's public comments about Witness 4 and Witness 3's involvement in the Sprung Structure issue. At the end of the exchange, Councillor Plante responded as follows:

"You make a municipal issue about yourself while doing [Witness 3] and [Witness 4]'s bidding. I am grateful the mayor spoke out against this today.

Happy retirement. 🍷 "10

[post included a meme of DJ Khaled¹¹ and the sentence "Congratulations, you played yourself"¹²]

In another part of the exchange, Councillor Plante quote tweeted another post from the local MPP with a comment which includes, in part, the following, "I reached out to you by text and you have my number. I also emailed the Barrhaven BIA back in the summer. Happy to chat anytime but stop pretending that [Witness 3] isn't behind this or that [Witness 4]'s property is not next to the site."

In respect to this last post, Witness 2 responded to Councillor Plante as follows:

"I am shocked that a city councillor would go on twitter and take shots at a former Councillor, the BBIA and the residents of our community. You can disagree with

⁹ Though the Barrhaven location was not selected, one of the two sites selected for a Sprung Structure was also located in the MPP's riding.

¹⁰ In one response, the local MPP indicated she was a retiring six term politician.

¹¹ According to the "Know Your Meme" website, DJ Khaled, is an American producer, personality and rapper who has gained an ironic online for posting bizarre content on Instagram and Snapchat <<https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/people/dj-khaled>>

¹² According to the "Know Your Meme" website, this meme means to reveal one's own weaknesses <<https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/congratulations-you-played-yourself>>

the stand our community and leaders took, but you need time to check yourself and the unprofessional remarks.”

The Respondent then engaged with other X users who responded to Witness 2’s post. One X user commented that Witness 2 is a former staff member of Witness 3, to which Councillor Plante added:

“..And [redacted] is [Witness 3]’s daughter.”

[post includes a link to the daughter’s biography on the BBIA website and a meme of Oprah Winfrey making a knowing gesture]

Another X user further added that another family member of Witness 3 was working for the local MPP.

Responding to another X user who had commented on Witness 2’s original comment, Councillor Plante posted the following:

“[Witness 2] has also been in FB [Facebook] groups using the same talking points as [the local MPP] and [Witness 4].

It’s almost like they are all working together...🤔”

To which Witness 2 responded with:

“What are you talking about? What Facebook groups? You ok Councillor?”

Councillor Plante then responded to Witness 2 with the following two tweets:

1. "Anyway, chu content que tu r’viennes, T’arrives en même temps qu’il’automne¹³ 🎵 🎵”

[post included a screenshot of a Facebook post by Witness 2 sharing an online petition opposing the Sprung Structure]

2. [Post was a screenshot of responses to a Facebook post¹⁴, including a response from Witness 3 encouraging Witness 2 to call her]

In her interview, Witness 2 stated that she took exception to Councillor Plante engaging with other X users about her connection to Witness 3 and the connections between various other community leaders.

¹³ Lyrics from “Toune d’automne” by Les Cowboys fringants.

¹⁴ During her interview, Witness 2 confirmed she did not know where the post in the screenshot was from.

As part of her exchange with Witness 2 on X, Councillor Plante brought Witness 1 into the narrative by posting the following¹⁵:

“Can someone confirm if [Witness 1] also worked for [Witness 3]? This is from July 21...

PS. I already know the answer”

[post included an image of a Facebook post posted in a Barrhaven community group¹⁶]

After the above posts from the Respondent, Witness 2 stopped engaging in this exchange.

November 22, 2024

The Respondent quote tweeted an X post from the local MPP, and stated, in part, the following:

“ ...

Remember: none of the debate about sprung structures is about transparency, a doctor’s office, the legion or whatever excuse will be cooked up next. It’s about protecting [Witness 4]’s property values and demonizing immigrants”

[post included an image of a text message released as part of ATIP disclosure package]

November 24, 2024

In a video posted to X, Councillor Plante spoke about an event planned for November 28, 2024, to oppose Sprung Structures to be held at a local recreational facility adjacent to one of the selected sites. In the video, she displayed a post Witness 1 posted in a Facebook group called KNASS (Kanata Neighbours Against Sprung Shelter) about the event. Councillor Plante notes that someone sent her a copy of the post.

Councillor Plante commented that that the event appeared to be organized by Witness 1 and noted that Witness 1 previously worked for Witness 3, who is a former elected official.

Councillor Plante identified a particular sentence in the post which read “We kindly ask that you sign up in advance to secure your spot.” Councillor Plante further explained

¹⁵ Witness 1 stated her belief that Councillor Plante’s negative comments about her began after Witness 1 sent a letter to Mayor Sutcliffe on behalf of BRASS on November 7, 2024. Councillor Plante stated that she was unaware of the letter and had not seen it.

¹⁶ Witness 1 stated the Facebook post was a community update from Witness 3 when Witness 3 was an elected official.

that the registration page asked for personal information including first and last name, phone number and email.

Councillor Plante cautioned viewers, “Do not give these people your personal information. These types of events are generally held to get your personal information, because as everybody knows, we have federal and provincial elections just around the corner and these will be used eventually as propaganda tools, as recruitment tools, whatever.”

Referring back to the Facebook post, Councillor Plante reiterated the information was posted by Witness 1 who was a former staffer of Witness 3. She advised viewers that the recreational facility is a municipal facility and there was no need to sign up to access the facility. In closing, Councillor Plante reiterated her recommendation that those who planned to attend the event do not give their personal information.

This same day, Councillor Plante was interviewed by a local media outlet about the event and the concerns she raised about the personal information requested from event organizers. Neither the video of the interview nor the news article makes any reference to Witness 1.

In her interview, Witness 1 denied that the personal information collected from rally participants would be used for political purposes and confirmed that she had never shared the information with anyone. Witness 1 further confirmed that neither Councillor Plante nor anyone from the Councillor’s team had asked Witness 1 about the intended use of the personal information.

Also on November 24, 2024, a Reddit discussion thread was started by a Reddit user who posted Councillor Plante’s video from X. A Reddit account named “rideauvanier2022” posted the following comment to the discussion:

“Someone sent me this earlier this month – is this true? Interesting that [Witness 1], who is organizing the “concerned citizens” data mining event was also [former elected official]’s chief of staff and niece.”

[image of organizational chart]

The organizational chart shows Witness 3 and her family member as the central figures with connections drawn to Witness 1, Witness 2, Witness 4, the local Ward Councillors, the local MPP and two independent journalists. The organizational chart includes notes for each individual including connections to other individuals and organizations, and a picture depicting the proposed Sprung Structure site in Barrhaven and the building owned by Witness 4.

November 25, 2024

In respect of the November 24th local news article, an X user posted as follows:

“An event I did not know I wanted to attend until I saw the included video
Ottawa city councillor concerned over sprung structure debate as protests
continue

[post included a link to news article]

Councillor Plante responded with:

“I did not know that [Witness 1] is [former elected official¹⁷]’s niece and former
EA. Are you sure you want to go down that hole again?”

[post included a link to media article concerning the criminal trial of the former
elected official]

Another X user responded with “What does this have to do with sheltering immigrants?”

Councillor Plante responded:

“Good question. You should ask her. Why is she working for an alleged opaque
‘concerned citizens’ group while also claiming over 20 years of political
organizing and advocacy”

[post included a link to a bio for Witness 1]

That same X user responded, confirming they were part of the citizens’ group and
expressed their belief the organizers were taking names to support a future political
career as an elected official. Councillor Plante responded with:

“Can you confirm she is working for a political party registered under the Canada
Elections Act?”

[post included an image of a Reddit post that claimed, among other things, that
the rally was organized by the Conservative Party of Canada and that Witness 1
is an organizer for a federal MP to create a wedge issue prior to the federal
election]

This same day, Councillor Plante was interviewed by a local radio station. In the
interview, Councillor Plante spoke about the public meeting/rally concerning the Sprung
Structures and led off the interview by explaining that the event was organized by
Witness 1 whom she said was the niece of a former elected official and had previously
worked for Witness 3.

In the radio interview, Councillor Plante referred to Witness 1 as a “political operative”
and alleged that by organizing a community event at the local recreational facility to

¹⁷ This former elected official is distinct from Witness 3 who is also a former elected official.

discuss Sprung Structures, Witness 1 planned to collect names of those present as a recruitment tool. Councillor Plante did not specify the nature or purpose of the recruitment but went on to allege that Witness 1 and other event organizers were being selective about the information they put out concerning the Sprung Structures. She said the room was booked by the local MPP and said the meeting was “strange and bizarre” since the topic of discussion was within municipal jurisdiction, but no one from the municipality had been invited.

November 26, 2024

Councillor Plante posted a second video as a follow-up to the November 24th video. In the second video, she commented that she had learned a lot since posting the first video and had updates. The video focused on the local MPP and explained that because the City is a “creature of the Province”, the provincial government could step in and take action in respect of the Sprung Structure issue.

In respect of the event planned for November 28, Councillor Plante repeated her belief the event was organized by Witness 1 and restated that Witness 1 was former staffer to Witness 3. Councillor Plante added that she was also alerted to the fact that Witness 1 is the former EA and niece of a former elected official and displayed a bio of Witness 1.

In addition to questioning what the local MPP had done in respect of the Sprung Structure in Barrhaven, the Respondent comments that the local MPP could reach out to Witness 3 and refers to Witness 3’s work in 2020 to negotiate that a new Salvation Army community centre in Barrhaven would not have any overnight occupants (meaning no shelter services).

November 27, 2024

Councillor Plante quote tweeted the local MP’s post about the annual general meeting of the BBIA with the comment, “I wonder how many horses [Witness 4] had at the event.” The post included an image of an email in which Witness 4 states that he had “two horses in this race”, referring to a building he owns that is a direct neighbour of the potential site for a Sprung Structure in Barrhaven.

November 28, 2024

In another video, Councillor Plante talked about the local MPP and further challenged whether the MPP had taken any steps or made any comments on the Sprung Structure issue in the Ontario Legislature.

In reference to the event to be held later that day, Councillor Plante stated: “If you are going to the data mining event held by [local MPP] and former staffer to [Witness 3] and niece of [former elected official], [Witness 1], tonight Thursday, maybe you should ask why have you never brought this up at Queen’s Park?”

November 29, 2024

The president of a local community association issued a letter to all Members of Council which expressed concern about the conduct of several Members of Council (not specified) within the context of the public debate on Sprung Structures. A limited email exchange ensued between the community association president and some Members of Council in which the community association president specifically identified the online conduct of the Respondent towards Witness 1 and Witness 4 and indicated members of the community were afraid to speak out for fear of being harassed by elected officials.

Determination on the allegations

In determining findings of fact, I use the standard of proof required of fact finders in civil cases, the balance of probabilities. The balance of probabilities standard requires that the evidence be “clear, convincing and cogent”¹⁸ and that I “scrutinize the relevant evidence with care to determine whether it is more likely than not that an alleged event occurred.”¹⁹

To determine whether the Respondent’s alleged actions or behaviour breached the Code of Conduct for Members of Council, the first step is to make factual determinations on a balance of probabilities.

As noted above, the alleged misconduct set out in the formal complaints is summarized into two main allegations. I have considered each allegation and determined whether, on a balance of probabilities, the allegation is substantiated.

1. The Respondent inappropriately disclosed personal information about residents, including posting screenshots from emails and private Facebook pages.

All the witnesses acknowledged that the information shared by the Respondent was factual, and the Respondent did not share personal information about the witnesses that was not already in the public domain.

For her part, the Respondent maintained that she did not post information about the witnesses that was not already publicly available. She pointed out that in fact, some of the witnesses themselves publicize the same information in LinkedIn profiles or the information was disclosed through an access to information request and therefore public.

¹⁸ F.H. v. McDougall, 2008 SCC 53 at paragraph 46

¹⁹ Ibid. at 49

I accept the Respondent's evidence that the information she disclosed in her social media posts was already within the public domain and in most cases proactively disclosed by the witnesses.

I do not find Allegation 1 to be substantiated.

2. The Respondent engaged in harassment and intimidation of residents and community leaders on social media by making (in some cases repeatedly) accusations, inferences and disparaging *ad hominem*²⁰ remarks about community leaders who were opposed to a Sprung Structure in Barrhaven.

There is no dispute that the Respondent made the social media posts and other comments at issue in the complaint.

The witnesses stated that they felt demeaned and intimidated by Councillor Plante's *ad hominem* remarks. Each said they had no issue with the Respondent arguing the facts, but each said that the personal links between or among those opposed to the Sprung Structure and Councillor Plante's comments about those links were irrelevant to the argument at hand. Each felt the personal comments were posted by the Respondent to imply they were engaging in some sort of improper conduct or to insinuate a nefarious purpose. I accept that each of the witnesses felt, subjectively, the negative feelings described.²¹

Three of the four individuals who were cited in the Respondent's social media posts were active participants in the online community discussion on Sprung Structures. Witness 3 insisted she was not involved, and that the Respondent brought her into the debates by repeatedly referencing her alleged connections to Witnesses 1, 2, and 4. In her response to the formal complaints, Councillor Plante stated that whether or not Witness 3 was posting on social media about the issues, Witness 3 was certainly advocating against a Sprung Structure in Barrhaven. Councillor Plante further indicated in her interview that a number of Members of Council had confirmed to her that Witness 3 had spoken to them regarding the Sprung Structure in Barrhaven. In her interview, Witness 3 confirmed she had received calls from the local Ward Councillors and another Member of Council and had discussed the issue. I find that Witness 3 was participating in the debate, although not online and not publicly. She denied that she

²⁰ As stated in footnote 1, the Merriam-Webster definition of *ad hominem* includes: "marked by or being an attack on an opponent's character rather than by an answer to the contentions made". (Definition of *ad hominem* (adjective) in Merriam-Webster online dictionary <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ad%20hominem#dictionary-entry-1>) The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines the term as "directed against a person's character rather than their argument." (The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/ad-hominem?q=ad+hominem>) (accessed June 12, 2025).

²¹ For clarity, I did not rely on a subjective test alone. As described below, I considered whether a reasonable person would have felt disrespected, demeaned, intimidated, or harassed.

had lobbied or accessed Councillors in a way that other citizens would not be able to do to put forward her views on Sprung Structures.

The Respondent explained that her rationale for posting about the witnesses was that she believed the witnesses were all involved, directly or indirectly, in the opposition to the Sprung Structure in Barrhaven. She thought the different links between the people involved and how they all connected to the Sprung Structure issue was interesting, pertinent and important information for the general public to understand.

The Respondent disagreed with the positions taken by prominent community members who were organizing against a Sprung Structure in Barrhaven and felt that at least some of the participants in the public debate were motivated by improper considerations.

She further explained that the area surrounding the community centre in her Ward where asylum seekers were being housed is a low income, racialized community with very little social capital. Residents in that area are unlikely to organize. This was contrary to what Councillor Plante perceived to be a very well orchestrated, well coordinated response by individuals who were well connected (politically) and savvy about political processes.

In her response to the formal complaints and in her interview, the Respondent maintained that she did not intend to intimidate or bully the witnesses in the course of the public debate on Sprung Structures.

In his report, the Investigator noted that being publicly named in a negative manner because of taking a position on a public issue would tend to make one feel uncomfortable and underscore that their character and motivations were being called into question. However, the Investigator acknowledged that it would be difficult to conclude on the evidence that the Respondent's actions were calculated to be intimidating.

I accept that the Respondent did not set out to intimidate or bully members of the public and community stakeholders who opposed the placement of a Sprung Structure in Barrhaven. Based on the evidence before me, I find that the four witnesses referenced in the Respondent's social media posts were directly or indirectly involved in the opposition to the Sprung Structure in Barrhaven, even if Witness 3's participation was not well-known publicly.

There are many examples where the Respondent engaged with members of the public who expressed opposition to the Sprung Structure matter that involved a civil exchange of opinions and information. However, I find that the manner in which the Respondent largely engaged with and posted about these witnesses, which included the use of memes, emojis and innuendo, was disrespectful and rose to the level of intimidation and bullying.

I accept that the witnesses, along with some other members of the public observing the Respondent's posts on social media, felt intimidated and hesitant about engaging in the public debate about Sprung Structures. The Respondent did not simply state factual information about the witnesses, she made inferences and insinuations that to a reasonable person would appear to challenge the credibility and integrity of the witnesses.

I find, on a balance of probabilities, that Councillor Plante made each of the posts or comments on social media as alleged by the Complainants. I find the facts alleged in Allegation 2 to be substantiated.

Analysis

In respect of the substantiated allegation (Allegation 2), the question to be determined is whether Councillor Plante's conduct breached the Code of Conduct, and in particular, Section 7 (Discrimination and Harassment).

The complaints were filed between November 12 and December 5, 2024. On January 29, 2025, City Council updated the Code of Conduct for Members of Council as part of the 2022-2026 Mid-Term Governance Review. No changes were made to relevant sections of the Code of Conduct, including Section 7.

In keeping with the principle of procedural fairness, I have conducted this inquiry in an independent and impartial manner. In accordance with the Complaint Protocol, the Respondent has had the opportunity to respond to the allegations, and to a draft of this report.²² The reasons for my conclusions and recommendations are set out below.

My determination of whether Councillor Plante breached the Code of Conduct is informed by consideration of:

1. The Interpretation Bulletin on the Use of Social Media; and
2. The Respondent's freedom of expression while engaged in a political issue and the Code of Conduct limitations on free speech.

Interpretation Bulletin on the use of Social Media

In September 2020, City Council requested the City's previous Integrity Commissioner, along with the City Clerk, to review existing Codes of Conduct to produce an interpretation bulletin addressing social media behaviour by Members of Council, as well as members of local boards.

²² The Respondent received a draft of this report that included all sections except the "Conclusion." It is my practice to develop the Conclusion after receiving a response from the Respondent on the draft report.

In response, in December 2020, the Integrity Commissioner provided Council with the Interpretation Bulletin as an appendix to his 2020 Annual Report. The Interpretation Bulletin on the Use of Social Media remains posted online on Ottawa.ca. Although the former Integrity Commissioner produced the Interpretation Bulletin, I confirm that it reflects my position on Members' use of social media.

The [Interpretation Bulletin on the Use of Social Media](#) confirms that the entirety of the Code of Conduct for Members of Council applies to Members' social media activity. Respecting online conduct, the Bulletin includes:

“Section 7 of the Code of Conduct for Members of Council and the Code of Conduct for Members of Local Boards impose a duty on Members to treat members of the public, one another and staff with respect and without abuse, bullying or intimidation, and to ensure that their work environment is free from discrimination and harassment.

These provisions set standards for the behaviour of Members, both offline and online. Members should be aware that their positions as public officials cannot simply be turned off and should treat their social media presence as extensions of their public personas. Members are expected not to use offensive language when interacting with members of the public or each other online. While heated language and debate are part and parcel of informal expression on social media, civility and respect should remain the overriding concern for Members.”²³

In his 2020 Annual Report, the Integrity Commissioner commented on the ethical context of the Interpretation Bulletin on the Use of Social Media:

“As with any space where a Member of Council interacts with members of the public, the general spirit of the Code of Conduct already applies, because social media platforms are simply extensions of physical spaces. While the line between private and public roles may blur over social media, positions of authority persist online—along with the power to misuse that authority. As such, public office holders using accounts representing the City will always be perceived to be acting in their public capacity, and will always be expected to practice “sober second thought” before speaking, and to maintain the same decorum expected of them during Council proceedings.

(...)

²³ City of Ottawa Integrity Commissioner, “Interpretation Bulletin on the Use of Social Media”. <https://ottawa.ca/en/city-hall/open-transparent-and-accountable-government/integrity-commissioner/codes-conduct-and-related-policies#section-d0d2d191-5f6b-4fe2-a488-2a0876b7c092> (Accessed June 11, 2025).

While this interpretation bulletin is being produced as a separate document, it is important to remember that it is not a stand-alone policy—this bulletin supplements the structured piece of legislation that already provides these protections: the Code of Conduct as it applies to Members of Council and members of local boards.”²⁴

In my 2021 Annual Report, I highlighted key themes of the Interpretation Bulletin, and encouraged Members to be mindful of the core values of the Code of Conduct: integrity, accountability, transparency, and respect.²⁵

In 2022, in response to requests for advice I received from Members of Council related to abuse and harassment on social media platforms, I issued Social Media Engagement Guidelines to Members of Council,²⁶ which:

- Confirmed that the principles and guidance set out in the Interpretation Bulletin on the Use of Social Media continue to apply;
- Set out what reasonable action Members could take to address abusive and hateful comments; and
- Made available for Members to post on their social media pages, at their discretion, the following “Engagement Guidelines”:

Engagement Guidelines

Respectful debate and engagement are welcomed and encouraged. Comments that include profane, hateful, or abusive language or that are discriminatory, harassing or threatening in nature may be deleted. These guidelines reflect the responsibilities and obligations set out in the Code of Conduct for Members of Council.

These guidelines were incorporated into the Interpretation Bulletin.

Orientation material provided to all Members of Council at the outset of the 2022-2026 Term of Council included a section on the Interpretation Bulletin on the Use of Social Media. This information remains available to Members on an internal website.

²⁴ 2020 Annual Report of the Integrity Commissioner, p. 27-28: <https://documents.ottawa.ca/sites/documents/files/2020%20Annual%20Report%20of%20the%20Integrity%20Commissioner.pdf>

²⁵ 2021 Annual Report of the Integrity Commissioner, p. 25-26: https://documents.ottawa.ca/sites/documents/files/2021_ar_en.pdf

²⁶ 2022 Mid-year Report of the Integrity Commissioner. Appendix 1: Social Media Engagement Guidelines, p. 37: <https://documents.ottawa.ca/sites/documents/files/Document%201%20-%202022%20Mid-year%20Report%20of%20the%20Integrity%20Commissioner%20%28EN%29.pdf>

Recent Annual Reports (2023 and 2024) have continued to reference the Interpretation Bulletin on the Use of Social Media.

Freedom of Expression

The broad subject of this inquiry is the Respondent's social media conduct.

I acknowledge that the public debate over the use of Sprung Structures was a political one. As referenced above, the matter was debated at Council. As Integrity Commissioner, it is not my role to comment on any Member's policy position or restrict any Member's ability to take part in important matters of political or public debate. I acknowledge that Members of Council participate in such debate to express their position, represent the views of their constituents and encourage public engagement in municipal government. It is important that Members have the ability to engage in such debate, in and outside of a formal meeting setting.

Furthermore, I acknowledge that the Respondent's freedom of expression is a fundamental freedom set out in the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. With that said, it is widely acknowledged that while freedom of expression is a fundamental right, it is subject to reasonable limits, including limits imposed by municipal codes of conduct.²⁷

Recent court decisions support the broad principle that codes of conduct put limits on elected officials' freedom of expression. The 2025 Divisional Court wrote in *Jubenville v. Chatham-Kent (Municipality)* that the Integrity Commissioner "identified numerous communications and social media posts" made by a Member of Council and determined they contravened the relevant section of that municipality's Code of Conduct as they were "abusive, bullying, and intimidating." The Integrity Commissioner's report briefly addressed the Member's freedom of expression rights and concluded that the conduct amounted to a breach of the Code, even during a political matter related to a motion before Council. The Divisional Court upheld that determination with respect to the violation of Chatham-Kent's provision similar to s. 7. The Court wrote:

"In the context of the emotionally-charged environment that arose before and after the motion that the Applicant brought to Council, the Integrity Commissioner's decision that the Applicant breached s. 15 of the Code was a reasonable one. It was a decision that, based upon the evidence before her, fell

²⁷ *Robinson v. Pickering (City)*, 2025 ONSC 3233

within the reasonable array of outcomes available to the Integrity Commissioner.”²⁸

In another example, the 2024 Divisional Court decision *Kaplan-Myrth v. Ottawa Carleton District School Board* described:

“The *Code of Conduct*’s stated purpose is to “establish a standard of conduct and a mechanism for managing inappropriate conduct” for trustees in discharging their duties. The *Code of Conduct* does not restrict trustees from expressing views but limits the manner in how they express those views. It requires civility and respect in expressing those opinions.”²⁹

In the 2025 Divisional Court decision *Robinson v. Pickering (City)*, the Court referred to the municipal councillor’s right to freedom of expression as limited by the code of conduct, and to the Integrity Commissioner’s balancing of that right against the Commissioner’s statutory mandate to enforce the code of conduct:

“The Supreme Court of Canada has repeatedly held that administrative decisions may limit an individual’s rights under the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* where the limit is proportional to the statutory objective that the administrative agency is required to fulfill. “If, in exercising its statutory discretion, the decision-maker has properly balanced the relevant *Charter* value with the statutory objectives, the decision will be found to be reasonable.”

In the instant case, there is no doubt that the Second Decision engaged with the applicant’s argument about her right to freedom of expression. The Commissioner expressly acknowledged the importance of this right.

The Commissioner engaged in an appropriate balancing exercise. As reflected in the Second Report, the Commissioner expressly acknowledged that “[e]lected municipal officials are leading players in local democracy. They are democratically chosen to look after the community’s interests.” The Commissioner recognized the importance of elected officials exercising free speech, noting that a councillor’s “freedom of expression is a crucial instrument for achieving effective participation and good municipal government.” The Commissioner explained that elected municipal councillors function as “conduits

²⁸ *Jubenville v. Chatham-Kent (Municipality)*, 2025 ONSC 3598 at para 39. Section 15 of the Chatham-Kent Code of Conduct stated “All members of Council have a duty to treat members of the public, one another, and staff in a civilized way and without abuse, bullying or intimidation, and to ensure that their work environment is free from discrimination and harassment. The *Ontario Human Rights Code* applies, in addition to other federal and provincial laws.” The Divisional Court released this decision while I was finalizing my report, after I provided the Respondent with the draft report. I reference the decision in this report because it has bearing on the principles underpinning this inquiry.

²⁹ *Kaplan-Myrth v. Ottawa Carlton District School Board*, 2024 ONSC 4280 (para 48).

for the voices of their constituents: they interpret and convey their grievances respecting municipal government.”

On the other hand, the Commissioner properly recognized that freedom of expression is not an absolute, unfettered right: “it is limited by reasonable restrictions, including by requirements to protect the rights and freedoms of other persons.” Moreover, while acknowledging the important role that elected representatives play as “conduits for the voices of their constituents,” the Commissioner was sensitive to the need not to countenance unlimited and possibly harmful expression by allowing an elected official to justify their position as “merely reflecting the views of her constituents.” The Commissioner reasoned that it would be “completely unacceptable for a Councillor to publicly make statements in support of spousal abuse, antisemitism or slavery, regardless of whether these were the ardently-held views of one’s constituents.”³⁰

In making my determination of whether Councillor Plante breached the Code of Conduct, I considered the purpose of the Code of Conduct and whether the limits it places on a Member’s freedom of expression are appropriate.

There is no doubt that the conduct at issue is expressive activity which engages *prima facie* protection under s. 2(b) of the *Charter*. The statutory purpose of the Code of Conduct in Ottawa is similar to that in Pickering, Chatham Kent, and other municipalities in Ontario. The Code of Conduct recognizes that Members are elected to lead the community, look after its interests, and act as the voice of their constituents. The Code does not restrict Members from participating in debate; rather, it sets a standard of conduct which regulates how Members express their views. For example, the Code of Conduct requires civility and prohibits abuse, intimidation, and harassment. These limits are important to foster respectful debate and ensure community members are not fearful of repercussions if they express an opposing viewpoint. Freedom of expression is critical to allow Members to share dissenting opinions and enhance participation in municipal issues. However, targeting individuals in a manner which intimidates them and others from participating in public debate, contributes little to the marketplace of ideas.

Section 7 of the Code of Conduct sets out Members’ duty to treat members of the public, one another and staff with respect and without abuse, bullying or intimidation. In their interactions with the public, including their communications, those are the limits within which Members are required to operate. These are reasonable limits on how Members of Council may participate in debate and do not preclude meaningful

³⁰ *Robinson v. Pickering (City)*, 2025 ONSC 3233 (para 124 – 127).

expression on the issues. Enforcement of these limits contributes to the creation of a respectful atmosphere of debate.

From that perspective, I assessed whether the manner in which the Respondent communicated on social media, in respect of the substantiated allegation, contravened Section 7 of the Code of Conduct.

Section 7 of the Code of Conduct (Discrimination and Harassment)

Section 7 of the Code of Conduct states:

Section 7 - Discrimination and Harassment

All members of Council have a duty to treat members of the public, one another and staff with respect and without abuse, bullying or intimidation, and to ensure that their work environment is free from discrimination and harassment. The Ontario Human Rights Code applies and, where applicable, the City's Workplace Violence and Harassment Policy.

This inquiry examined specific social media posts Councillor Plante made in the course of an online public debate about a potential Sprung Structure in Barrhaven. Neither the Councillor's participation in the debate nor the position she held and advanced is at issue in this case. At issue is the manner in which Councillor Plante engaged in respect of the second allegation.

I examined each specific instance of online engagement cited in the formal complaints. In determining whether the manner in which the Respondent engaged online was in breach of the Code of Conduct, I considered the conduct as a whole. I did so because the communications were similar in nature and were all posted on social media. They were made in the same factual context in relation to the same issue: the public debate on Sprung Structures.³¹

For the reasons set out below, I find that the Respondent breached Section 7 of the Code of Conduct.

Section 7 places an obligation on Members of Council to treat members of the public with respect and prohibits bullying, intimidation, and abuse at all times and across all venues and platforms. As detailed above, the Interpretation Bulletin on the Use of Social Media confirms this obligation extends to Members' conduct on social media.

³¹ In her response to the draft report, the Respondent challenged the approach used in this report of considering the conduct as a whole, as opposed to analyzing social media posts on a post-by-post basis. Rationale for using this decision is provided at this section, and in the "Inquiry Process" section of this report.

In reaching my conclusions, I considered the definitions of the conduct prohibited in Section 7:

- Disrespect: Low regard or esteem for someone or something.³²
- Bullying: Abuse and mistreatment of someone vulnerable by someone stronger, more powerful, etc.³³
- Intimidation: The act of making someone timid or frightened.³⁴

In the Respondent's social media posts that I examined in this inquiry, I observed a pattern of disrespectful manner of engagement with the witnesses. Councillor Plante's engagement featured *ad hominem* remarks, emojis, memes and innuendo, all of which appears to be intended to discredit the witnesses.

The Merriam-Webster definition of *ad hominem* includes: "marked by or being an attack on an opponent's character rather than by an answer to the contentions made". The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines the term as "directed against a person's character rather than their argument."³⁵

I find the Respondent's use of *ad hominem* remarks and manner of communication in respect of the second allegation to be disrespectful, and to exhibit bullying and intimidation in contravention of Section 7 of the Code of Conduct.

I observed the Respondent's disrespectful manner of engagement, for example, in the Respondent's use of innuendo and emoji in the context of the following tweet:

"[Witness 2] has also been in FB [Facebook] groups using the same talking points as [the local MPP] and [Witness 4].

It's almost like they are all working together...🙄"

The "...🙄" used in this context conveys sarcasm and calls into question the witnesses' credible engagement in the debate.³⁶

³² <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/disrespect> (noun) (accessed July 7, 2025).

³³ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/bullying> (noun) (accessed July 7, 2025).

³⁴ <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/intimidation> (noun) (accessed July 7, 2025).

³⁵ Definition of *ad hominem* (adjective) in Merriam-Webster online dictionary <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ad%20hominem#dictionary-entry-1> and The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/ad-hominem?q=ad+hominem> (accessed June 12, 2025).

³⁶ In her response to the draft report, the Respondent indicated that the draft report erred in concluding that the use of memes or emojis generally contravened Section 7 of the Code of Conduct. For example, the response cites the emoji referenced here, noting it "is used to express that an individual is thinking about another person's remarks and may have questions or concerns about them. It is not necessarily an

I observed a similar use of sarcasm and innuendo in the Respondent's post:

"Can someone confirm if [Witness 1] also worked for [Witness 3]? This is from July 21...

PS. I already know the answer"

As noted in the "Timeline" section, above, Witness 1 stated the Facebook post in the image was taken from a community update from Witness 3 when Witness 3 was an elected official. The Respondent's inclusion of the image with the remark "PS. I already know the answer" alludes to some sort of improper conduct on the witnesses' part, and/or that the witnesses' involvement in the debate had a nefarious purpose. I find this manner of communication to be disrespectful to Witnesses 1 and 3.

The Respondent's post of a meme depicting a male character entering a room with the words: "Behold a man has arrived to share his manly view" provides a clear example of the Respondent's disrespectful manner of engagement with Witness 4.

Figure 1: Meme posted by the Respondent July 25, 2024



As described above, Councillor Plante said the meme was intended to convey someone who was commenting beyond their knowledge and that Witness 4 was incorrect about the proposed uses of the Sprung Structure. However, the Councillor did not communicate that message in a respectful manner. Instead, she used a disrespectful meme that was directed personally at Witness 4. I find that a reasonable interpretation

expression of sarcasm." I accept that description of the emoji in general; however, when used in the context of the tweet described above, I find that it conveys (and is intended to convey) the items described. For clarity, this inquiry does not find that the use of an emoji is a breach of Section 7 of the Code of Conduct. Rather, it concludes that its use is problematic in the circumstances as described in the report. The entire tweet cited above is part of a broader pattern of the Respondent's disrespectful communications.

of the meme is that Witness 4's opinions are invalid or not worthy of consideration because of his sex.

In her July 15, 2025 response to the draft report, the Respondent submitted that the socio-economic context of her speech was "worth bearing in mind." The response stated:

"Councillor Plante represents a community with a large proportion of low-income community members. Social services in her community had long been adversely impacted by the need to house asylum seekers. Sprung Structures were a potential solution to that problem, that would restore much needed services to vulnerable community members."

The response stated that there was a "significant political movement from affluent communities within Ottawa to oppose the creation of Sprung Structures in their communities", which "would have perpetuated historical disadvantage." The Respondent indicated it was in this context that she identified the connections and motivations of individuals involved in the debate. I do not accept the Respondent's description of the context as a rationale justifying the disrespectful manner of the Respondent's posts, including that of the meme featuring a male character (Figure 1). I do not, for example, believe that meme would, to a reasonable person, highlight the socio-economic context described.³⁷

Witness 4 indicated that he was offended by the meme and found it to be pejorative, inappropriate and harassing.

I further observed the Respondent's use of sarcasm, innuendo and disrespectful *ad hominem* remarks in the post:

"I did not know that [Witness 1] is [former elected official]'s niece and former EA. Are you sure you want to go down that hole again?"

[post included a link to media article concerning the criminal trial of the former elected official]

The post identified personal and professional links between Witness 1 and a former elected official, used the disparaging remark: "(a)re you sure you want to go down that hole again?", and linked to an article about the former elected official's criminal trial. The Respondent's choice to link to that specific article indicates an attempt to discredit the witness because of her familial relationship, and to draw into question her engagement in the debate.

³⁷ This meme is first referenced on p.13 of this report. While I included a description of the meme in the draft report provided to the Respondent, I have now included a copy of the meme at page 32, which I felt was necessary to illustrate why I do not accept the Respondent's position.

Similar innuendo is evident in the meme included in Councillor Plante's post:

"...And [redacted] is [Witness 3]'s daughter."

[post includes a link to the daughter's biography on the BBIA website and a meme of Oprah Winfrey making a knowing gesture]

The knowing gesture in the meme implies something untoward and, in my view, aims to discredit Witness 3 and her family member.

When asked about this post in her interview, Councillor Plante stated her belief that Witness 3 was very involved in the Sprung Structure conversation and had reached out to multiple Councillors and staff of Members of Council. Councillor Plante stated it would be interesting to point out that the individuals opposed to the Sprung Structures, one of whom had a connection to the BBIA, were related.

Similarly, the investigator asked Councillor Plante about her post that drew a connection between Witness 1 and Witness 3 and their previous employment relationship.

In response, Councillor Plante described her perspective on Witness 1's involvement with the BRASS group, stating her view that the BRASS group:

"...did not disclose anywhere who was behind that group. They made it look like it was some sort of community groundswell, and I was pointing out that it wasn't. It was a very well-coordinated Barrhaven BIA, former staffer response to the Sprung Structure, not a community groundswell of protesting and organizing etcetera.

And given what a hot topic this was, I felt that was very relevant information because the people, the community that lives around my community centre is a very low income, racialized community with very little social capital. These are not people that can organize. They don't even speak English or French. So, I found it very pertinent to point out that the people organizing against it were people who were very, very well connected politically. They are savvy about political processes. And, quite frankly, there's a huge power imbalance between them and the people living around the Bernard Grandmaître Arena."

I acknowledge Councillor Plante's explanation of why she wanted to make known the identities, and political connections, of individuals opposed to the Sprung Structure in Barrhaven. I would take no issue with the Councillor conveying factual information about individuals involved in the opposition if the manner of communication complied with the Code. I acknowledge that information could be helpful to members of the public when

considering or engaging in the public debate and/or consuming the social media content from those individuals.³⁸

However, Councillor Plante did not present the information in a respectful manner. Her manner of engagement with the witnesses, in the communications examined in this inquiry, was marked by the disrespectful use of memes, emojis, innuendo and disparaging *ad hominem* remarks. Not only was it disrespectful, it rose to the level of intimidation and bullying due to its repeated nature and the clear attempts to undermine a viewpoint by drawing connections between the individuals and suggesting those connections were suspicious. They felt that the Respondent was intimidating them in an attempt to silence them. I agree that this is a reasonable interpretation.³⁹

In totality, the Councillor's posts had the effect of making the witnesses and others fearful of engaging in the public debate. I find the Councillor's conduct amounts to bullying and intimidation.

The latter part of Section 7 requires that Members ensure that their work environment is free from discrimination and harassment. As noted in the Interpretation Bulletin on the Use of Social Media, online spaces should be treated as extensions of a Member's office and that Members should be mindful of the safety of others in respect of the content they create, and the content created by others on their platforms. Based on the allegations and my review of the evidence, I find that Councillor Plante engaged in harassment.

As defined in the 2023 inquiry concerning the conduct of Members of the Manotick BIA Board, harassment generally refers to a course of vexatious comment or conduct that is known or ought reasonably to be known to be unwelcome.⁴⁰

³⁸ The Respondent's response to the draft report indicates the Respondent's posts pertained to particular individuals and "expose(d) connections, relationships, or motivations involving those individuals." It states the posts regarding the relationships and motivations were "founded on factual information and were, to the best of (Councillor Plante's) knowledge, accurate." For clarification, it is my view the manner in which the Respondent communicated the connections between individuals – with innuendo and disparaging *ad hominem* remarks – inappropriately brought their personal integrity into question.

³⁹ In her response to the draft report, the Respondent submits that it is not true that, as a result of her posts, some of the witnesses were hesitant about engaging in public debate on Sprung Structures. The response cites Witness 4's "continued advocacy and public presence" respecting Sprung Structures. I accept the witnesses' statements that they subjectively felt demeaned and intimidated by Councillor Plante's posts, and hesitant about engaging. Further, as demonstrated in the letter from a community association president on November 29, 2024, other members of the public observing the Respondent's online conduct were hesitant about engaging in the public debate when a site in a different community was selected.

⁴⁰ Report on an Inquiry Respecting the Conduct of Members of the Manotick BIA Board of Management, pg. 101: <https://pub-ottawa.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=149327>.

I find the Respondent knew or ought to have known that her comments towards and about the witnesses was unwelcome. In fact, Witness 2 confronted the Respondent about the personal comments she was making about residents and community leaders, and suggested the Respondent stop and consider her “unprofessional remarks”.⁴¹

I am mindful that my role is not to regulate public debate, and it is imperative that dissenting opinions not be silenced. That said, I find the persistency of the Respondent’s posts and the targeting of the witnesses crosses the threshold of harassment. The Respondent made repeated references to the witnesses in response to other users’ posts or in making her own social media posts.

Witness 3 is not a user of the social media platforms the Respondent was using, namely X and Reddit. Though the Respondent had reason to believe Witness 3 was indirectly participating in the public debate, there was no evidence that Witness 3 was engaging on the online social media platforms. The Respondent ought to have known that Witness 3 would likely not engage directly with the posts mentioning her as part of the online public debate. The Respondent also made *ad hominem* remarks about other witnesses without tagging them and in posts which did not involve them.

I accept that it was not the Respondent’s intention to harass the witnesses and that she believed she was shedding light on what she perceived to be a well-organized opposition campaign. However, her comments were designed to highlight that the views expressed by the witnesses should not be accepted, because of the connections between the individuals or, in one instance, their connection to a family member who had been involved in a criminal trial. The intention was to leave an impression that the witness was associated with a criminal and should not be believed. The Respondent’s persistent disrespectful comments and *ad hominem* remarks about the witnesses constitute a course of conduct that ought reasonably to be known to be unwelcome. Further, as a consequence of her persistent targeting of the witnesses, other social media users joined in, adding to the innuendo and inference and making personal attacks. The Respondent continued this behaviour after being asked to stop.⁴²

⁴¹ In her response to the draft report, the Respondent submitted that referring to harassment as conduct that “is known or ought to reasonably be known to be unwelcome” is problematic in the context of online public debate because “anyone engaging online in the political process might assert that viewpoints that disagree with them or criticize their connections or motivations “unwelcome.”” It is not the Respondent’s asserting of an opposing viewpoint that I consider unwelcome in this context. Rather, it is the specific course of conduct – the persistent, disrespectful manner of engagement, including *ad hominem* remarks and other features described in this report – that were unwelcome. I drew that conclusion applying both a subjective and objective test (i.e. that a reasonable person would believe the conduct was unwelcome).

⁴² In her response to the draft report, the Respondent submitted that a request to stop cannot end “legitimate political discourse.” The Respondent submitted that the draft report suggested the Code of Conduct allows someone to “silence an opponent merely by asking them to stop.” As noted in the

Having considered the evidence in its totality, I find the Respondent in breach of Section 7 of the Code of Conduct for Members of Council.

Conclusion

Section 15 of the Code of Conduct for Members of Council and Section 223.4(5) of the *Municipal Act, 2001* authorize the Integrity Commissioner to make recommendations to Council regarding sanctions and other remedial action when the Integrity Commissioner is of the opinion that there has been a violation of the Code of Conduct.

Section 15 of the Code of Conduct reads as follows:

- (1) Members of Council are expected to adhere to the provisions of the Code of Conduct. The *Municipal Act, 2001* authorizes Council, where it has received a report by its Integrity Commissioner that, in his or her opinion, there has been a violation of the Code of Conduct, to impose one of the following sanctions:
 - (a) A reprimand; and
 - (b) Suspension of the remuneration paid to the member in respect of his or her services as a member of Council or a local board, as the case may be, for a period of up to 90 days.
- (2) The Integrity Commissioner may also recommend that Council impose one of the following sanctions:
 - (a) Written or verbal public apology;
 - (b) Return of property or reimbursement of its value or of monies spent;
 - (c) Removal from membership of a committee; and
 - (d) Removal as chair of a committee.
- (3) The Integrity Commissioner has the final authority to recommend any of the sanctions above or other remedial action at his or her discretion.

As detailed above, I found Councillor Plante breached Section 7 (Discrimination and Harassment) of the Code of Conduct. I found the Respondent engaged in harassment, intimidation and bullying of members of the public through her conduct on social media.

Councillor Plante's conduct caused the witnesses and other members of the public to be intimidated and hesitant about engaging in the public debate about Sprung

"Analysis" section of this report, Witness 2 confronted the Respondent about the personal comments she was making about residents and community leaders. It was this behaviour that the witness addressed, not the Respondent's broad engagement with the public debate. The witness asking the Respondent to stop is evidence not only that the witness perceived the conduct as improper, but that she communicated that to the Respondent.

Structures. It is unfortunate that a Member's online conduct discouraged legitimate participation in the public debate of this matter.

I believe sanctions should correspond to the conduct in question and be applied in a progressive manner as appropriate. The most serious sanction possible under the legislation is suspension of remuneration up to 90 days. Sanctions are normally progressive in their severity, depending on such factors as the experience of the Member, how flagrant the behaviour, and whether the Member expressed acknowledgement of misbehaviour, or remorse/ regret.

In determining the recommended penalty, I have taken the following into account. While this is the first finding of a breach of the Code for this Respondent, this inquiry made the serious finding that the Respondent's persistent, disrespectful conduct amounted to intimidation, bullying and harassment of members of the public.

A suspension of pay, as recommended in this case, is generally meant to deter future misconduct. The recommended duration of the suspension of pay (three days) is brief, in acknowledgement of the fact that this is the first finding of a breach of the Code for this Respondent, as well as the following mitigating factors:

- This is the first Integrity Commissioner report to Ottawa City Council focused on a Member's conduct on social media. Inquiry reports are intended to serve an educational role, and a public report and a finding of a breach of the Code of Conduct is meaningful.
- The Respondent's *ad hominem* remarks were disrespectful and appeared to be intended to discredit the witnesses; however, the language of the posts was not cruel or intensely hostile. The social media posts examined in this inquiry did not feature abusive language.⁴³
- Councillor Plante's response to the allegations indicated an openness to resolving the matter. As described above, Councillor Plante voluntarily deleted some of the social media posts identified in the formal complaints. She expressed her openness to meeting with the complainants to discuss the issues and requested resolution of the complaints through the Informal Complaint Procedure.⁴⁴

⁴³ The Merriam-Webster definition of "abusive" includes: "using harsh, insulting language" and "using or involving physical violence or emotional cruelty." <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/abusive> (accessed July 31, 2025).

⁴⁴ As described in the "Inquiry Process" section, all complainants declined to participate in the informal process expressing reluctance and apprehension about engaging with the Respondent following her social media posts.

- In her written response to the allegations, Councillor Plante conveyed that it was never her intention to harass or bully anyone, but to participate in the public debate. When the Investigator asked Councillor Plante if there was ever an intent on her part to intimidate or cause distress to anyone, she confirmed there was not. She further responded that she would never want anyone to feel “lesser than” or to feel “belittled.”

As detailed above, while I examined each specific instance of online engagement cited in the formal complaints, in determining whether the manner of Councillor Plante’s engagement breached the Code, I considered the conduct as a whole. The recommended sanctions reflect my global finding of a Code contravention.

Therefore, I recommend that City Council:

1. Receive this report, including the finding that Councillor Plante contravened Section 7 (Discrimination and Harassment) of the Code of Conduct; and
2. Suspend the remuneration to be paid to Councillor Plante in respect of her service as a Member of Council for 3 days.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'KES', with a long horizontal line extending from the bottom of the signature.

Karen E. Shepherd
Integrity Commissioner