



Media Release

July 20, 2018

On Monday July 16th, the OPP began an investigation into “threats made to a staff member of the Township of Lanark Highlands”. This investigation according to the OPP’s press release is “open and on-going”.

This is a devastating event for the municipality as it has led to the following letter of resignation from our valued Clerk Administrator Allison Vereyken. In her letter she wrote:

“Over the past couple of days I have received some verbal threats in regards to the disparaging miscommunication that has been filtering through social media in regards to the fire department and this morning I received a half-burnt letter that threatened to burn my house down. I do not condone or wish to be a victim of bullying, violence or harassment in the workplace or any place for that matter, nor do I wish to place my family or myself in danger by following policy and procedure during my employment at the Township of Lanark Highlands. This act of criminal violence has been reported to the OPP and they are currently investigating the incident.

I feel that myself and my family have volunteered many hours in our short time in the community to help clean up the ball park, repair and paint bleachers/walkways, weed flower beds, clean restrooms at the arena and at the beach in Lanark to help the community flourish and show the community that we are active members and that I am not just an employee. The verbal threats and now written threats received by myself are completely disgusting and unacceptable. It is with a heavy heart that I put forward my resignation from the Township of Lanark Highlands effective immediately.”

This event may have been entirely avoidable if false rumours and misinformation had not been widely circulated on social media, in the press and by email.

I would like to firmly state that the rumours indicating that there has been a mass resignation of Fire Service members is false information. I am very disappointed that the ratepayers of the Township have been put into a situation where they are being made to fear for their safety in the event of a fire or medical emergency. This tactic is reprehensible, and the disseminators of this information are clearly not acting in the best interest of the community.

Everybody in this Township must surely be aware that the guiding “driver” for our volunteer firefighters is to serve their community. When there are a few careless and thoughtless individuals who put their own interests above the community’s interest, their actions should be assessed by members of this

community accordingly. Our LHFS members give tirelessly of their personal time and put their own health and safety on the line and deserve to be respected for their contributions to our Township and do not deserve to be tainted by the clear self-interest of others.

As much as I would like to blame the few “bad apples” who seem to form part of our community, ultimately we all need to take some responsibility for promoting positive change. We have to decide who we are as a community. Are we going to let ourselves fall victim to the self-interests of those who prefer to sow dissension and disrespect in the face of facts? In my opinion, the attacks against staff and members of Council in social media and in our letters to the editor in our community newspapers achieve nothing. They are an indicator, to me at least, of the loss of respect for the people who work for us and those who are our elected representatives. We are all trying the best we can to serve this community, regardless of the views expressed in the rhetoric and baseless accusations being bandied about by a few people.

These recent events, including the OPP investigation, will be difficult for us to overcome in terms of keeping our reputation intact as a great place to live, work and play if we allow the negative forces to prevail unchallenged, as they have recently. It is incumbent upon each of us within this community to eliminate the culture of intimidation, disrespect and bullying.

The “Public Information Meeting” scheduled on Monday July 23rd at Timber Run Golf Course is not a Township meeting. For those of you who still have lingering concerns about issues with the Fire Service, the Township will be holding an Information Session (Open House), drop-in format on Thursday July 26th at the Lanark Highlands Township office at 75 George Street from 4:00 pm to 8:00 pm. The purpose of the drop-in format is to provide a one-on-one opportunity to ask and clarify any questions or concerns regarding the operations of the Fire Service as a result of the misinformation that is circulating. The session will not be the forum to discuss the recent staffing actions or the OPP investigation due to privacy and confidentiality requirements.

Please feel free to contact me by phone or email should you have any immediate questions or concerns at (613) 259-2398 at extension 233 or by email at brian_stewart@sympatico.ca.

Brian Stewart

Mayor, Township of Lanark Highlands.