

A Presentation to the Council Re-claiming the Right to Ask a Question and Make a Comment

Over the last several years, I, like many other Canadians have been paying closer attention to our government. All levels of government; federal, provincial and local.

I have come to believe that local government, in many ways, is the most important of the three. It is *the* form of government that people most interact with. We may not personally know federal or provincial representatives but many of us know at least one councillor.

In my council for the Municipality of Yarmouth there is one thing that has surprised me. There does not appear to be any allowance made to question or challenge ideas.

In both the Provincial and Federal levels of government there is always an opposition party or parties, whose duty and obligation is to challenge and “point out” problems with all ideas put forward. This is kind of a critical thinking approach to solving problems. But that appears to be lacking in our Council.

Even in a Canadian court of law, there is a prosecution and a defence; two opposing sides so that it is more likely that true justice will result.

What I am suggesting is a 15 or 20 minute period at the beginning of each Council Meeting be set aside for comments and or questions from the citizens of Yarmouth County. (If there were only a couple of questions at a particular meeting, then this period of time could be shortened).

In doing research for this presentation, I looked at other Councils across Canada. I discovered that a large number of Councils encourage their

citizens to ask questions and to make comments. There doesn't appear to be any prudent justification to deny the citizens of Yarmouth Municipality this right.

Of course there should be some rules governing this. Some Councils require that you register to ask a question. Other Councils do not require this. Some Councils limit the question period to 15 minutes. Other Councils allow more time than this.

When you stop and think about it, the fact that there is no time at all allotted for questions or comments from the citizens of Yarmouth County is unbelievable in a society that claims to be democratic.

As it stands now, the public votes for a candidate that they hope will best represent their views on the Council and then they must wait four years until the next election comes around before they can formally have any input. This is a shocking state of affairs and cannot be allowed to continue.

I hereby ask The Council to do what is both just and prudent: establish a **Comment / Question Period** at the start of each meeting going forward. There should be no delays, such as forming a committee to study the matter. This is simple stuff. If after some period it is obvious that 15 minutes is not enough time or too much time, then amendments can be considered. Procedures can be tweaked if improvements become obvious.

There is an old saying, that justice delayed is justice denied. The current arrangement won't do and must be changed immediately.

At the front of our council chamber is a shield or plaque representing this Council's motto. On the shield are two words, **Prudence and Justice** – obviously intended to act as an inspiration to the Council as a

whole. I would suggest that as long as the citizens of Yarmouth County cannot simply ask a question or make a comment to their council members during a formal meeting, there is little prudence and no justice.

A Matter of Respect:

When writing rules pertaining to asking questions and making comments, an effort should be made to show respect to the citizens who fund everything to do with our Council. This should be a matter of common sense. But just as an example, you would not disrespect members of the Council by stating or putting in writing that “Municipal Councillors must refrain from clapping, shouting, swearing, booing or other inappropriate and disruptive behavior during a council meeting.” Neither should you speak to the public that way.

If an individual problem arises, that problem should certainly be addressed but we should assume that both The Council and the Public will show respect for each other.

The Council, when making rules, should always remember that they are representatives of the citizens and that they are public servants (servants of the public in other words) and all the costs; their salary, their chamber and their offices and their surroundings and all their schemes and the projects that they approve or initiate are ultimately funded by these same citizens.

