

Collingwood mayor, CAO in legal standoff

Sandra Cooper, John Brown at odds over mayor's decision to publicly retract letter

NEWS Apr 25, 2017 by [Ian Adams](#) Collingwood Connection



Collingwood's chief administrative officer John Brown speaks at a council meeting in March 2017. - Metroland file photo



Mayor Sandra Cooper gives her address at the inauguration of the 2014-18 council. - Metroland file photo

Collingwood's mayor and its chief administrative officer have retained lawyers amid accusations between the two of bullying and violations of the town's code of conduct.

Emails between Mayor Sandra Cooper and CAO John Brown obtained by Simcoe.com document the fallout after her decision to publicly retract a letter she sent Collingwood General and Marine Hospital board chairperson Thom Paterson without first advising municipal staff.

In that March 10 letter, Cooper called on the hospital to remove "erroneous (and) potentially slanderous" information from its website regarding the town's perceived position on the proposed redevelopment of the hospital.

In a radio interview six days later, Cooper backtracked and apologized for the letter, later telling Simcoe.com she had questioned it before signing it and never felt comfortable having it sent.

According to emails sent between March 16 and March 20, Cooper's announcement on the radio appeared to catch Brown completely off guard, and he later told the mayor in an email he would be filing an informal complaint under the town's code-of-conduct policy.

"I have just listened to the mayor's comments on the radio this morning and must admit to being totally shocked by what I heard ... compared to what I heard her say at our meeting last week on the same topic," Brown wrote in an email sent to council and several staff members. "I know that what the mayor has stated to the public on the radio is simply not true, and so must all of you.

"It is most unfortunate that the mayor should now blame staff for something which she consented to and fully supported during the course of our meeting."

Brown wrote it had been Cooper's position to send a letter to Paterson.

Brown then apologized for the mayor's "misrepresentation of the factual situation." He added the mayor "appears to have forgotten almost completely in such a short period of time" the meeting in which the letter had been discussed.

"It is unfortunate that the mayor has chosen to publicly retract the agreed-upon letter and not advise staff in advance."

Brown followed that email with a second one informing the mayor that he was filing a complaint based on her decision to retract the letter, and that he was requesting she make a public apology to staff at council's March 27 meeting.

"If you choose not to provide a public apology to staff and confirm that you indeed were fully aware of the letter and were a supportive participant in the discussion to prepare the letter under your signature, I, as the town's chief administrative officer, will be obligated to take this matter to the provincial Ombudsman's office."

Cooper has not issued an apology.

Cooper shot back with accusations the CAO was acting in a "highly-inappropriate manner, without respect or consideration for the mayor's office or the people of Collingwood."

"I do not understand your motive or desire to continue with your divisive and caustic approach related to me and the many great organizations that contribute to our basic fibre as a community," she stated. "While I recognize that I must always strive to do a better job as mayor, I will stand strong on the fact that I do not misrepresent the truth, lie, or deceive the people of Collingwood. I believe my family, my church, and my community will attest to this."

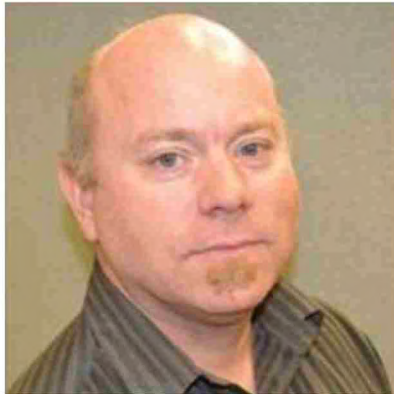
Cooper delivered an ultimatum to Brown to either give her a written apology and retract his email, file a formal complaint specific to her conduct, or resign

immediately, “recognizing your inability to deliver the quality of service required to serve the best interests of the people of Collingwood in co-operation with council and the mayor’s office.”

Cooper stated that, in the absence of a response, she would file an official complaint with the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and “commence appropriate action with my own lawyer.”

“I will no longer be bullied by you or your co-ordinated efforts. Your behaviour will come to an end, one way or another.”

Both Brown and Cooper have declined to comment.



by [Ian Adams](#)

Ian Adams is a reporter for Simcoe.com, covering community news and events throughout south Georgian Bay, and municipal councils in Collingwood and Wasaga Beach.

Email: iadams@simcoe.com [Facebook](#) [Twitter](#)

- **Tags:**
- **News - Council,**
- **News**