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Integrity Commissioner Report  
Township of Mattawan  
Public Report Regarding Councillor Michelle Lahaye  
Prepared for Council of the Township of Mattawan

## **Preamble**

Expertise for Municipalities ("E4m") is the appointed Integrity Commissioner for the Township of Mattawan and is responsible for carrying out the functions assigned to an Integrity Commissioner under Part V.1 of the *Municipal Act, 2001*, including conducting inquiries into complaints concerning members of Council and reporting to Council regarding matters within its jurisdiction.

E4m received a request for inquiry from a member of the public arising from concerns regarding the conduct of Councillor Michelle Lahaye. E4m appointed Shawn Mahoney as investigator and agent for the purpose of conducting the inquiry.

The investigation included interviews with numerous witnesses and a review of documentary evidence, media reports, policies, correspondence, and other relevant materials. Findings were made on the civil standard of proof, namely, the balance of probabilities.

This report provides a public summary of the Integrity Commissioner's findings.

Council has also received confidential information regarding workplace-related matters arising from the same course of conduct. That information is protected under the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* and the *Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* and cannot be disclosed in this public report.

## **Jurisdiction**

### **Integrity Commissioner Jurisdiction Over Council-Appointed Local Board Members**

Before considering the merits of the complaint, it is necessary to address whether the Integrity Commissioner has jurisdiction to investigate conduct that occurred while Councillor Lahaye was acting as a member and Chair of the North Bay-Mattawa Conservation Authority ("NBMCA").

Much of the conduct under review occurred in connection with Councillor Lahaye's activities at the NBMCA rather than during meetings of Mattawan Council. It may therefore be argued that concerns regarding her conduct are matters exclusively for the Conservation Authority and fall outside the jurisdiction of the Township's Integrity Commissioner.

We do not agree.

Councillor Lahaye was appointed to the NBMCA by Mattawan Council by virtue of her office as a member of Council. She did not occupy that position as a private citizen or independent appointee. She served as the Township's representative and exercised the authority associated with that appointment as an elected official of the Township.

The *Municipal Act, 2001* provides for inquiries concerning whether a member of Council or a local board has contravened the applicable Code of Conduct. The issue in this case is therefore whether Councillor Lahaye's conduct, as a Member subject to the Township's Code, complied with the standards established by that Code.

The fact that the NBMCA was not required to appoint its own Integrity Commissioner does not remove Councillor Lahaye from the accountability framework established by the Township. Such an interpretation would create a gap in accountability where a member of Council could be subject to the Code while acting at the Council table but not while carrying out responsibilities through a Council-appointed position.

Council appointments are an extension of public office. When a member of Council serves on a local board, agency, authority, committee, commission, or similar body as a representative of the municipality, that individual remains subject to the obligations and standards imposed by the municipal Code of Conduct.

The evidence establishes that:

- Councillor Lahaye was a sitting member of Mattawan Council throughout the relevant period;
- she was appointed by Council to represent the Township on the NBMCA;
- the conduct under review arose directly from her activities in that appointed role;
- the conduct engaged obligations owed to municipal staff, local board staff, fellow board members, and the broader public; and
- the Township's Code of Conduct expressly contemplates application to Members serving on local boards.

The concerns identified during the investigation relate to principles that are fundamental to municipal governance regardless of whether the conduct occurs at the Council table

or around a Board table. These include respect for staff, appropriate governance boundaries, confidentiality, workplace conduct, and behaviour that can undermine public confidence in local government.

The allegations do not concern technical decisions of the Conservation Authority, disagreements regarding environmental policy, or disputes respecting the exercise of statutory authority under the *Conservation Authorities Act*. They concern the conduct of an elected official, including alleged mistreatment of staff, interference with administration, public criticism of employees, public statements concerning professional competence and integrity, confidentiality concerns, and behaviour inconsistent with the standards expected of a member of Council.

These are questions of conduct and accountability, rather than questions of Conservation Authority policy.

Accordingly, the Integrity Commissioner is satisfied that Councillor Lahaye remained subject to the Township of Mattawan Code of Conduct throughout the period under review and that jurisdiction exists to inquire into and report upon the conduct at issue.

## **Background**

The allegations giving rise to this inquiry originated from concerns regarding the conduct of Councillor Lahaye while acting as both a Board Member and former Chair of the NBMCA.

The allegations included:

- repeated public criticism of staff;
- allegations concerning staff competence and integrity;
- interference in operational and administrative matters;
- involvement in personnel matters;
- disregard for governance boundaries;
- inappropriate public commentary concerning active files;
- confidentiality concerns; and
- conduct that adversely affected staff and the workplace environment.

The investigation involved interviews with current and former employees, elected officials, board members, municipal representatives, and the respondent herself. Documentary evidence and extensive media reporting were also reviewed.

## **Findings**

### **General Nature of the Conduct**

The evidence established a sustained pattern of conduct that departed significantly from the standards expected of an elected municipal official.

This was not a matter arising from a single disagreement, an isolated lapse in judgment, or a difference of opinion regarding governance. The evidence demonstrated repeated conduct over an extended period that adversely affected staff, governance processes, working relationships, organizational effectiveness, and public confidence.

The investigation established that Councillor Lahaye repeatedly involved herself in operational matters that properly belonged to staff and administration. Witnesses consistently described conduct that blurred the distinction between governance and administration and undermined professional staff in the performance of their duties.

The evidence further established repeated public criticism of staff, including statements questioning professional competence, integrity, judgment, and conduct. These comments were frequently made publicly and, in a number of instances, without adequate factual foundation. The effect of those statements was to undermine confidence in municipal and Conservation Authority staff and expose employees to reputational harm.

Numerous witnesses described conduct that they regarded as intimidating, demeaning, hostile, confrontational, and disruptive. Witnesses reported significant adverse effects on morale, trust, workplace relationships, and organizational stability. Staff described fear, stress, anxiety, and concern regarding retaliation. Board members similarly identified a breakdown in governance, deteriorating relationships between elected officials and staff, and substantial organizational disruption.

The cumulative evidence demonstrated conduct that was persistent, public, harmful, and inconsistent with the responsibilities of public office.

### **Respect for Staff**

Respect for municipal and local board staff is a fundamental responsibility of elected office.

Municipal employees are entitled to perform their professional responsibilities without personal attacks, intimidation, public disparagement, interference, or conduct that undermines their professional reputation.

The evidence established repeated conduct by Councillor Lahaye that failed to meet those standards. Staff members were publicly criticized, accused of wrongdoing, subjected to allegations, and placed in positions where their professionalism and integrity were openly questioned. Witnesses consistently described conduct that eroded confidence, damaged relationships, and impaired the functioning of the organization.

The Integrity Commissioner finds that Councillor Lahaye failed to demonstrate the respect, professionalism, and restraint required of an elected official when dealing with staff.

### **Governance and Abuse of Position**

The investigation also demonstrated repeated disregard for the distinction between governance and administration.

Councillor Lahaye became involved in matters relating to personnel, hiring, staff supervision, permit files, administrative decision-making, and operational oversight. Witnesses repeatedly described conduct that exceeded the proper role of an elected official.

Public institutions function effectively when elected officials respect the roles assigned to staff and allow trained professionals to perform their duties without improper interference.

The evidence established a pattern of conduct that undermined those principles and contributed to organizational dysfunction.

### **Occupational Health and Safety Act Considerations**

The workplace-related findings are significant. The inquiry identified a pattern of conduct involving multiple employees, including bullying, intimidation, and reputational harm.

This conduct is inconsistent with the standards of professionalism, respect, and appropriate use of authority expected of an elected official and raises significant concerns in relation to the workplace protections and standards established under the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*.

### **Determination**

Having considered all of the evidence, the Integrity Commissioner finds that Councillor Lahaye contravened the Township of Mattawan Code of Conduct.

The evidence establishes that Councillor Lahaye:

- failed to treat staff with appropriate respect and professionalism;
- improperly undermined the professional reputation of staff;
- interfered with administrative and operational matters;
- failed to respect established governance boundaries;
- engaged in conduct that adversely affected staff and the workplace environment;  
and
- engaged in conduct incompatible with the standards expected of members of Council.

These were not technical or procedural violations.

Rather, they constituted a sustained pattern of behaviour that significantly affected workplace relationships, public confidence, and the effective functioning of public institutions. The seriousness of the conduct is increased by its repetition, duration, public nature, and impact on employees and organizational operations.

### **Recommendations**

The findings in this report demonstrate serious and sustained conduct that is inconsistent with the Township's Code of Conduct. The response should reflect the seriousness of the findings and the need to maintain public confidence in the Township's governance.

Accordingly, the Integrity Commissioner recommends that Council:

1. Remove Councillor Lahaye from all committees, boards, agencies, authorities, and other bodies to which she has been appointed by Council, including the North Bay-Mattawa Conservation Authority, and appoint a replacement where permitted by law.
2. Suspend remuneration for a period of ninety (90) days as permitted under the *Municipal Act, 2001*, is appropriate, having regard to the seriousness, duration, repetition, and impact of the conduct established by the inquiry.
3. Undertake a governance review and implement measures to reinforce the separation between governance and administration, establish clear expectations for Council members in their interactions with staff, and ensure that concerns involving staff are addressed through appropriate governance and workplace processes.

## **Conclusion**

The citizens of Mattawan are entitled to expect integrity, professionalism, sound judgment, and respect from those elected to serve them.

The evidence established in this inquiry demonstrates conduct that repeatedly fell below those standards. The conduct undermined staff, damaged organizational effectiveness, impaired public confidence, and was inconsistent with the responsibilities entrusted to an elected official.

The Integrity Commissioner concludes that Councillor Lahaye contravened the Township of Mattawan Code of Conduct through a sustained pattern of conduct that was serious, repeated, and harmful to staff, governance, and the effective functioning of public institutions.

The findings warrant a significant response from Council.

Respectfully submitted,

Integrity Commissioner  
Township of Mattawan