

From: Kim Burnett ■■■■■
Sent: March 6, 2024 2:23 PM
To: Office of the Legislative Counsel
Subject: Proposed Consolidation of Antigonish

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Dear Honourable Members of the Legislation Amendments Committee for Nova Scotia,

I am writing you today to implore you not to move forward with Bill 407 - Consolidation of Antigonish - or to make significant amendments to it if you do.

Fundamentally, as a resident of the Town of Antigonish, I do not want to see this passed. I am neither for, nor against, consolidation. But I am vehemently opposed to this process. I have a Master's and PhD in Global Governance. I know a great deal about democracy, democratic engagement, and democracy, and this is a gross violation of the fundamentals of democracy, and is indeed a blatant attempt to usurp democratic process and citizen voice to pass a bill that seems to most of us to be in the unclear interests of elected officials and not citizens. At this point I would like to bring forward a response to MLA John MacDonald, who repeatedly asked in the hearing Monday about the role of councillors and elected officials to make decisions on behalf of residents. To which I would like to point out the text of the Municipal Government Act that contradicts this perspective:

"Staying informed on the concerns facing the greater community will also help you to discuss these issues when they arise at council. Best practices include regularly speaking with, and learning from, your constituents and their concerns in the municipality. Raising relevant issues at the council table is an important part of your role as the voice of the residents you serve." (MGA, p.3)

This has not been done by anyone but the councillors who voted against this. In town, Sean Cameron and Diane Roberts, who are the only two who have ever had a conversation with me. Rather, by commencing this process immediately after a municipal election without platforming on it, this completely avoided consultation of the most accountable form. This is grossly negligent and duplicitous. Who platforms on beautification when they are planning a consolidation? Why? What were they scared to learn? There have been numerous invitations to all of the elected municipal members of government who voted for this consolidation to answer questions and respond to feedback, and they have repeatedly declined or comically vapid responses have been given. I myself asked numerous quantitative and qualitative questions of substance about the consolidation, and have received occasional drivel that did not speak to my questions, or my questions were completely ignored (generally in strange communications strategies from the Mayor, which I have recorded). Meanwhile, instead of being accountable to the lack of consultation, the entire process has been spun that this is not the role of our elected officials. I was in a meeting when Willie Cormier listed his credentials, and

stated that he was better suited, as a result, than citizens to make these decisions. As someone with a PhD in Global Governance, with a specialization in Global Political Economy, who has worked for the United Nations and the Federal Privy Council Office, in addition to numerous international NGOs and now as a professor, I can assure you that I am more qualified than Willie Cormier, with his accounting degree. But to the more important point, I am not - nor will I ever be - so better qualified than the citizens of a jurisdiction to make a decision that I would undermine their democratic rights to. I am qualified such that I know not to do this. This represents a complete derelict of the democratic duty by the elected representatives of town and county who support this.

Secondly, let me clarify some statistical analysis for you on the representation of the population in the poll showing that well over 70% of residents will vote against the PCs if they vote to pass this. The mayor liked to spin the data to say it was not representative of demographics, with few 18-45 year olds and too many seniors. That's one way to look at it (40% of 18-45 if you count STFX students, I am assuming). But here is another way to spin it - one that is more relevant to the questions asked in the poll, and more relevant to you. Thing voting data - and who votes the most. You will see a question on *voting preferences* is probably more relevant to a voting demographic than general demographics. According to elections Nova Scotia, in 2017 64-74 year olds were the most active age demographic of voters, and by contrast, the share of the population dropped by age thereafter. I don't have 2021 numbers, but you and I both know it hasn't likely changed much. You won the election by less than 2% last year. You're descending in popularity. I know a LOT of folks in my community who voted PC who will never vote for you if you pass this. We are many and we are angry, and you can call that emotional if you'd like, but I call it citizen action, completely rational in the face of such an front to democracy, and I'd be worried if people weren't actively engaged in this shocking demonstration of autocracy.

I have been to some of the town halls, I have spoken to my neighbours, I have spoken to strangers. I can tell you the VAST majority of people are appalled by this process. I can also tell you that there are many among us who are PRO amalgamation. I solicited signatures from neighbours on the petition you could not accept - some were in their 80s signing a petition for the first time in their lives. You don't get to take our right to decide. And the duplicity with which this has taken place has generated a complete distrust of the individuals who voted for this. Our anger is just, rational, and rooted in our democratic rights; we will exercise this at the polls.

You saw fantastic and substantive testimony on March 4th from Anne Marie Long, Terry Penny, and Soan Cameron, to name only three of many. I uphold what they have put forward. I want to see this Bill trashed. If not, shelved, until after the municipal election in 7 months, and if not, then wait for the results of our appeal. And let the citizens of Antigonish decide who plans the transition, if you won't solve it. Do not give that duty to the people we distrust.

Member of the Amendments Committee - you have a choice - you can uphold the principles of democracy, or you could mobilize how the residents of a very politically active community vote, who have made it clear they will not vote for you if you push this through. I have worked in policy for decades. I cannot imagine why you would allow your careers to hinge on this town and county's amalgamation without a vote. But it wouldn't surprise me if you did. If it weren't so true, the expression wouldn't exist: pride goeth before the fall.

Yours sincerely,
Dr. Kim Burnett, PhD
Antigonish, Nova Scotia