To members of Yellowknife Press

In Wednesday’s paper the editorial entitled “An Embarrassment of Council Crises” raised concerns that the Rules of Conduct complaints filed by Mayor Heyck and myself might distract from more important work on Council’s plate for the next year. I completely disagree. For the past 2 years this Council has worked very hard and cohesively to get things done. I know my colleagues and myself will not let this get in the way of Council business.

That does not mean that the Mayor and myself have a perfect relationship, far from it. Three years back I questioned the Mayor’s leadership abilities and I can see now that he took that very personally. In large part I think that explains this whole drama. But even though we don’t see eye to eye on all issues, it has not stood in the way of Council’s work in the past and will not in the future. As far as I’m concerned after having this matter dragged out behind closed doors for 22 months without Council’s knowledge, I now just want to hand this matter over to the Conduct Review Committee, abide by their decision, and move forward.

But before I move forward there are a couple of things in the papers editorial that require clarification. The paper seems to be saying that the Rules of Conduct complaints are a waste of time. That is absolutely not the case. Among other things, our formal complaint process acts as a check on abuses of position and power. The process is designed so that no single member of Council can pursue a personal vendetta against another member of Council without the rest of Council and the public knowing about it. If this type of abuse were to happen more often then you would truly see a Council crisis. So in my opinion you’re focussing on the wrong problem.

And that’s exactly what I think happened in my case. Yes I lost my temper during an interaction with city staff. I’ve admitted this and I’m certainly willing to apologize for it. Maybe it was an issue that warranted a Rules of Conduct complaint and maybe it wasn’t, but Council never got a change to find out because the Mayor didn’t use the established compliant process. He kept Council completely in the dark and invented a “kangaroo court” disciplinary process that he dragged out for 22 months. Because it was a fabricated process I had no idea what the outcome might be for myself, my family or my business. It was a stressful time, especially for my family. I finally had enough and demanded that Council be made aware of the situation, and Council quickly deemed the Mayor’s kangaroo court process to be inappropriate.

The other issue that has been oversimplified in the editorial is the situation that led to all of this, my relationship with building inspections. I’m far from the only contractor to have been completely frustrated in dealings with the department. Contractors don’t have any way to appeal a building inspectors decision…. Even when the decision is clearly wrong… and this can lead to unnecessary costs, delays and a lot of tension. In other cities they have appeal mechanisms in place so that contractors do not have to argue their side with the inspector. Since I was first elected in 2012 I’ve been pushing for a review of the Planning and Development Department to look at this and other issues. That review happened this year and two months ago the consultants confirmed in their final report that this is a serious issue. They recommended the City create an appeal mechanism, and just this past Monday Council adopted their recommendation. I’m very happy that the contracting community will soon have a way to prevent these types of heated exchanges in the future.

Finally, since this will be my final public comment on the issue until the Conduct Review Committee completes its work, I want to add that I think the Mayor’s surprise press conference last week was ridiculous and confirms my thoughts about his leadership. As a parent it really bugs me when people casually throw around the word “bullying” to describe a disagreement between two adults (and especially politicians!) If the Mayor, who has been in a position of power over me for two years and has arguably been abusing that power, calls me a bully for finally saying enough is enough, then he’s going to have a hard time explaining bullying to a kid who is actually experiencing it.

Council’s has acted with integrity since finding out this whole drama. Has our Mayor and supposed leader done the same?

Niels Konge

Yellowknife City Councillor.