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Port Coquitlam councillor launches defamation lawsuit against city

Coun. Laura Dupont is also seeking a judicial review of the council decision to censure and sanction her for allegedly disclosing confidential information

[Gary McKenna](#) / Tri-City News

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Coun. Laura Dupont has served as a Port Coquitlam councillor since 2014
Photograph By FACEBOOK

A Port Coquitlam councillor is taking legal action against the municipality after she was censured last week for allegedly disclosing confidential information.

Coun. Laura Dupont's lawyer said they are seeking damages for defamation and a judicial review of the decision to sanction her, noting council failed to pass a public resolution required by the Community Charter before holding a closed meeting.

"As a result, there was no legitimate in-camera meeting, therefore there can be no claim that the information is confidential," said attorney Sebastien Anderson.

The lawyer also questioned the city's authority to sanction and censure a council member.

"There is nothing in the Community Charter that gives them that power," Anderson added. "The only sanction in the Community Charter is a councillor can be disqualified when they have a conflict of interest."

The defamation case stems from two city-issued press releases through which council announced the decision to censure Dupont.

In the [first statement](#), released Thursday, the city said the sanctions were based on independent third-party findings that Dupont had disclosed confidential information in breach of section 117 of the Community Charter. The city would not elaborate on what information was leaked.

In an interview with *The Tri-City News* shortly after the statement was released, Dupont apologized for what she called a "mistake." However, she said the sanctions were "extremely heavy handed" and the public would be "surprised" if they knew the details.

Dupont's comments prompted a [second press release](#) from the city, which Anderson said repeated the defamatory statements.

"They repeated the defamatory information in that press release and went beyond it," he added. "It talked about her having been provided with due process and procedural fairness and we are disputing that as well."

In the notice Anderson sent to the city on Tuesday, Dupont is seeking to be reinstated to her committee appointments and be allowed to participate in the acting mayor rotation. It also asks that any limits on her access to confidential information be removed.

The city of Port Coquitlam confirmed they have received the legal notice from Dupont's lawyers, but said they would not "provide further information due to the pending legal action."

In a notice Anderson sent to the city on Tuesday, he asks that Dupont be reinstated to her committee appointments and be allowed to participate in the acting mayor rotation. It also seeks to remove any limits on her access to confidential information.

The issue has exposed divisions at city hall.

Dupont said she believes the censure is an effort to silence her views on environmental protection and climate change. She also described a "culture of bullying" at the council table since the last election.

"It has been an intimidating place," she said. "I have been feeling extremely intimidated."

However, Dupont's council colleagues disagreed with her characterization of what prompted the censure motion.

In a joint statement released Friday, the five councillors and Mayor Brad West said Dupont's mistakes were not a "minor error" and that the city's response was justified.

"Council has taken the matter very seriously and would not have taken such actions over a minor error," the council members said in a statement. "The actions are directly related to Councillor Dupont's conduct and breaches of confidentiality and not related to any Council policy discussions or positions."

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