

British Columbia · Metro Matters

## Port Coquitlam councillor taking city to court after being censured

Laura Dupont disclosed confidential information but is being defended by colleagues across the region

[Justin McElroy](#) · CBC News · Posted: Jun 03, 2020 6:00 AM PT | Last Updated: 14 minutes ago



Port Coquitlam Coun. Laura Dupont was elected with the most votes of any of her colleagues in the 2018 election. (City of Port Coquitlam)

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After being censured by the rest of her colleagues on Port Coquitlam council, Laura Dupont is taking them to court.

Dupont sent a notice through her lawyer to Mayor Brad West on Tuesday, serving notice of pending litigation for her censure and removal from external boards and committees last week.

In a statement issued then, the other councillors said she was censured during a private meeting after a third-party investigator found she disclosed confidential information on three different occasions — but didn't say what that information was, beyond that it was serious and could have financial consequences.

In his note to West, Dupont's lawyer, Sebastian Anderson, said Dupont would be seeking damages for defamation and a court order reversing the council's decision, along with a declaration that the information she disclosed was not confidential.

Dupont, who alleged the decision to censure is related to her advocacy on climate change issues, said last week she apologized to council but felt she was being silenced by a "culture of intimidation."

West and the City of Port Coquitlam declined comment on the legal action but provided a previous statement where councillors said Dupont had made no complaints under the city's respectful workplace policy.

## Support outside PoCo

It's not often that a councillor is formally censured by their colleagues or stripped of certain responsibilities. And it's not often that Metro Vancouver politicians comment on the affairs in another municipality.

But both are happening in Dupont's case.

"I thought it was a very heavy-handed move," said Vancouver Coun. Adriane Carr, who chairs the Metro Vancouver Climate Action Committee that Dupont had sat on prior to her censure by Port Coquitlam.

Carr said Dupont was an "incredibly valuable" member of the committee, and that while she didn't know the reason for the decision, couldn't imagine it required such a large punishment.

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"There's an important balance," she said. "Giving people a second chance, and not just stripping them of their responsibilities and their roles unilaterally, over one thing .... I just can't even imagine."

New Westminster Coun. Mary Trenadue said the punishment doesn't seem to fit the crime.

"Divulging information from a closed meeting, quite honestly this happens often. I probably made the same mistake a number of times, but never purposely," she said.

"She admitted a mistake, and I completely believe her. So I think this censure isn't required in this situation. It's a way to shut someone down," she said.



Port Coquitlam Mayor Brad West says he can't comment on what information Dupont disclosed, but it was not a public policy issue. (Martin Diotte/CBC)

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## Codes of conduct

With few formal parties in local politics and [no mechanism to recall mayors or councillors](#), a notice of censure is one of the few ways to resolve disputes when a majority of councillors

believe one of their colleagues is in the wrong.

In recent years, the Union of B.C. Municipalities has helped municipalities [develop codes of conduct](#), which provide more formal and transparent processes to sanction councillors.

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"They work best when there's buy-in at a local level and being in place before there's a problem," said UBCM president Maja Tait.

"I go back to when we played board games: let's all read the rules at the beginning, so we understand the game ... in advance, so that we're not getting into the heat of it when there's a problem."

Dupont said she would support Port Coquitlam having a code of conduct going forward. However, Tait cautioned that it's not a magic bullet when it comes to resolving inter-council conflicts.

"While the vast majority [of councils] find a way ... to express positions and come to a unified decision that isn't always the case," she said.

"And when it's not the case, the impact can be very significant and take its toll on any local government."

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