

# Could Dennis be a diversion for what is really happening at city hall?

*Chris Cooke - April 2024*

For a successful stand-up comedian, success is a matter of timing.

For Sarnia City Clerk Amy Burkhart, timing is still a work in progress.

Bill Dennis, who again lost his cool in a very public display of vulgarity appears to suffer from a similar shortcoming.

The question that set off the inquisitive councillor centered on why Committee of Adjustment Chairman Jamie Dillon resigned.

Dillon, a former house builder with vast knowledge of city bylaws walked away from the chairmanship after being told he and other members of his committee needed retraining.

Burkhart actually answered the question before Dennis went ballistic.

“We got some additional training money,” Burkhart told the enraged councillor, and they decided to use it.

However, the decision to use it coincided with Dillon’s resignation the same week he and his committee ruled in favour of Sarnia businessman Kirkland Blake and his Lakeshore Road detailing shop.

The committee of adjustment ruled Stacey Forfar, general manager of administration and her planning gurus were out of line in demanding Blake needed a bylaw amendment to keep his fledgling business going.

And even if he did need a bylaw amendment, Dillon and his committee weren’t about to make any such demands on the young entrepreneur.

I could be wrong but I’m betting Dillon, who has an acumen for business is likely more knowledgeable about city bylaws than Forfar and her seemingly weak and ineffective band of city hall bureaucrats.

In fact, on the way out, Dillon suggested instead of trying to put Blake out of business, city hall should have been welcoming him with open arms adding, “I heard Forfar was enraged.”

If she wasn’t Dennis was.

Dennis was seething by the time council landed on the topic of an escape plan and potential security improvements at city hall.

Suggesting most of his council colleagues are socialists, losers and “clowns” Dennis exploded on Mayor Mike Bradley and Councillor Anne Marie Gillis who kept yelling “point of order the mayor has the floor.”

Gillis insisted the escape plan wasn’t about Dennis who had a meltdown last October and had to apologize for bad behavior.

In his latest tirade, Dennis revealed that he threatened to sue Bradley for comments made on local television in February. In particular the mayor honed in on the need for security at city hall “to deal with the actions of a councillor and his behavior towards citizens and fellow colleagues.”

At the time, Bradley described it as a “very serious issue and it has to come to an end.”

Apparently, it didn’t.

Dennis appears to have anger management issues that distort his often-valid message that city hall bureaucrats are overpaid, are obvious to the outside world and couldn’t give a damn about city taxpayers who fund their overblown pay cheques, benefits and expenses.

Admittedly, Dennis has a tendency to use a chainsaw when a scalpel would do.

Which brings me to Terry Burrell who appears to have a calmer, more reasoned demeanor to problems at city hall.

The councillor, who happens to be an accountant asks pointed questions in a pointed way after leaning on the Freedom of Information Act to find out why long - time city cleaner Craig Hill of Hill’s Cleaning Service was unceremoniously dismissed last fall.

The mayor, chief administrative officer Chris Carter and higher ups at city hall appear to be putting a cork in it not wanting to reveal why Hill’s bid which was never opened was possibly the low bidder.

The mayor has been using threats and pressure, to prevent insider information from leaking out.

He even suggested in an email to First Monday that there could be

‘legal repercussions’ if the information was leaked by members of council.

However, Burrell in an email to Ferruccio Da Sacco, of the accounting firm BDO complained about an apparent lack of “transparency and full disclosure” by the city administration with regard to

inquiries made concerning “financial matters”.

Da Sacco has been retained to do an audit of Sarnia’s finances, an apparent routine event.

In his email to Da Sacco, Burrell explained that he submitted questions regarding the cleaning contract but received “no responses” from the city’s administration something that has never happened in his 25 years as a councillor.

Additionally, Burrell told Da Sacco that he filed three Freedom of Information requests regarding the issue and the responses from the city clerk have either been “incomplete or less than robust”. Burrell added that he has insufficient information to support Mayor Bradley’s responses to Da Sacco’s audit letter.

Burrell ended his correspondence to Da Sacco by saying “I have reason to believe certain financial controls (at city hall) may be evaded”.

Beyond the smoke and mirrors of the Dennis tirade there could be a kernel of truth.

Could something be amiss?

Dennis is unlikely to find out.

But Burrell might.

I could be wrong about this but I’m usually not.