

Good afternoon Councillors. I am Holly Nahrebecky and I live in Boylston, which is where I grew up. After living away for 25 years, I moved back home in 2007.

There are many issues before council on a monthly basis that you must discuss and make decisions on of varying importance to the Municipality. Some are things that will not greatly impact the daily lives of residents or are administrative in nature. Other decisions you make are more impactful and have a direct and lasting effect on residents lives such as the taxes we pay, the Provincial laws that are being changed to enable CBRM to have an unfair advantage over our Municipality and the rest of the Province, support for lifting the ban on fracking in the Province, the Lifestyles Complex. While councillors are used to making these decisions without receiving or asking for input from constituents, it doesn't mean that you should.

You have been elected to represent your area's constituents and to make decisions based on what direction the people you represent want to go. There are decisions where councillors have a responsibility to find out what the majority of their constituents think about these issues BEFORE a decision is made..... to give the information to people and ask what they would like you to do as **their** representative.

You were not elected to take choice away from the people in this municipality. You were not elected to go it alone. It is our job as constituents to help you, to help us. And we want to

help and support Council but we can't do that if we are kept out of the process. This morning I read the article in the Chronicle Herald wherein Mr. Pitts stated that we haven't knocked on his door. But we have knocked, Mr. Pitts, through our Councillor when we organized the February 21<sup>st</sup> meeting and through the email I sent him the next day outlining what we thought the people who attended that meeting wanted Council to hear. You have not knocked back. When you hear rumblings in the community, can you not reach out to people, be proactive? When you know people have issues is it not part of every councillor's job to reach out to their constituents instead of hiding and waiting for it to blow over???

I have heard people from all over this Municipality say the same thing: that whether they agree or disagree with the decisions Council made they never see or hear from their councillor, didn't know what was happening until the decision was made, that everything is a big secret and discussed behind closed doors. Or they think that nothing they say will make a difference in how things are decided. Another common comment is "Things have always been done like that, things will never change" There is an apathy towards government and an acceptance that politicians don't listen, that politicians are untruthful and that they hide things. When challenged on decisions, there have been times when inappropriate, defensive replies are made which gives the impression that Council does not care what our opinions are, you **are** going to do whatever you want without any input from the people you represent. Is this really how Council wants to be viewed by it's constituents? By other municipalities, the Province and the Country? By potential residents and

visitors?

If we look back at MODG council meetings you notice many meetings are typically short, only 15 to 30 minutes long. In many of those meetings there are “In Camera” or Closed sessions at the beginning of the meetings instead of at the end, as in other Municipalities. This does not encourage constituents to attend meetings since they may be driving long distances and then asked to stand in the hallway for an unknown period of time. There are motions made and passed but we don't see or hear any discussion regarding the pros and cons, or where the idea for the motion even came from, almost as if they are “pre discussed”. There are brief verbal reports given by councillors who sit on committees but no written reports attached to the minutes.

In the Guide to New Municipal Councillors prepared by the Province of Nova Scotia it states:

“Not all voters will necessarily agree with your votes on council or the decisions of council as a whole. As an elected official, it is your role to listen and understand these opinions. While you may disagree or feel this is a fringe opinion, remember that you represent all members of the community. They have elected you to serve them and as a result you should do your best to hear the opinions of all community members, not just those who support you. Depending on your municipality, you may have increased visibility and recognition as an elected official. Being respectful and polite when dealing with members of the public will be helpful as an elected official and a public face of local government.

This is great advice for new.. and seasoned.. Municipal Councillors.

**Each and every one of you** has put your name forward for this job, and that job is to represent your district to the best of your ability, to make our Municipality a better place. It is not to further your **own** agenda and your **own** opinions, but those that are in everybody's best interest.

The responsibility is on **each of you** to make Council inclusive and open and to give all information to the public in all ways possible;

The responsibility is on **each of you** to be progressive and proactive;

The responsibility is on **each of you** to find out what the people of this Municipality think.

This is also **our** Municipality and **our** home and we have a **right** to know, and to contribute, to the path that is being mapped out for us.

In the MODG strategic plan one of the weaknesses listed in the SWOT (Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) summary is perceived lack of municipal communications and transparency. If it is perceived, then it is real and there is a problem.

We want to give you an opportunity to change that perception.

There are many things that can be done to have people feel more involved in their municipal government and make them feel a part of the process. Things like a semi-annual meet and greet community meeting in each district with the Councillor

and their constituents, a short question and answer period at the end of each Council meeting for the general public to ask a question or two, all In Camera sessions held at the end of council meetings, live stream meetings so those in the far reaches of the Municipality can virtually attend meetings. These are only a few simple changes and things that are standard practice in other municipalities. Just because it has never been done here, doesn't mean it **can't** be done.

It also states in The Guide to New Municipal Councillors: Participation by the public is a key factor in ensuring a healthy and representative democracy. Residents should feel their council provides enough opportunities for feedback and community opinions. **Your council** should provide ample opportunities for public engagement. Open and transparent meetings help residents feel connected to the municipal decision making process and that their opinions are heard by council.

On the MODG website it states:

The local government of the MODG strives to be responsive, progressive, approachable, and focused on serving the people and businesses who are here and thinking about coming.

It also states:

Moving forward, MODG will work to foster a community where individuals, groups and regions have a collective sense of belonging and the **capacity to participate** in the municipality's social, political, economic and cultural life.

This is your opportunity to show people that those are not

empty words and you do have their best interest at heart;  
This is your opportunity to show people that you want an open, interested and engaged community;  
This is your opportunity to start community dialogue, to begin a new era in our Municipal Government for others to look up to;  
This is your opportunity to set the bar for all Municipalities, to be a leader in an open, responsive, progressive, approachable **and** transparent government; to show that **we** can be better.

There is no quick fix here, and change takes time but it has to start somewhere. It is time to make positive changes and to take that progressive step into the future of good community involvement. I believe we all want the same thing... a successful, vibrant, involved and informed community.

We can do this, together. We **have** to do this together.

Saying yes to a Town Hall meeting is the first step in showing people that you are willing to do what it takes to make those changes that are necessary to have the type of future we all deserve.

Therefore, we are petitioning the Council of the Municipality of the District of Guysborough to agree to hold a well publicized Town Hall style meeting with all Councillors and all constituents of this Municipality.

Thank you for your time this afternoon.

