

## Council blog battle boils over; Newmarket councillor defends right to blog about municipal votes

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Illustrations: Newmarket Councillor Maddie Di Muccio posted details of a library board meeting on her blog, but colleagues say she was inaccurate and broke rules.  
RENÉ JOHNSTON/TORONTO STAR

A political dispute that might once have ended discreetly in council chambers is escalating into a fiasco on social media.

Maddie Di Muccio ran for Newmarket town council last fall on a ticket of fiscal responsibility and the promise to keep Ward 6 voters updated on Facebook, Twitter and her personal blog.

"I will publish every single vote that has a direct impact on this town, your taxes, and your daily living," vowed the 40-year-old former stay-at-home mother of three boys.

As a newly appointed library board member, she kept her commitment.

After a December meeting to ratify a labour contract, Di Muccio blogged that she cast the sole "no" vote.

She was alarmed, she said, that the library had not budgeted for the approved 2.25 per cent wage increase and that the library intended to cut volunteers.

Regional Councillor John Taylor, filling in for vacationing Mayor Tony Van Bynen, says Di Muccio got her facts wrong.

The budget did anticipate the wage increase, he said in an interview, and the library will take "anybody who wants to volunteer - as many as possible."

In Taylor's view, it was a serious lapse - he believes blogging inaccurate information is tantamount to accusing the board of irresponsibility, and that publicizing how she voted violates board rules.

Newmarket councillors are aware of the political battles that have roiled in neighbouring Aurora and Vaughan in recent years, where accusations and counter-accusations hurled in political blogs have lowered civil discourse, provoked lawsuits and all but paralyzed local councils.

Anxious to nip Di Muccio's criticisms in the bud, council assigned town lawyer **George Rust-D'Eye** to recommend ways to rein her in. He laid out 10 options earlier this month, ranging from "do nothing" to "prosecute the councillor for breach of statute or bylaw."

Di Muccio pushed back.

"Council can appoint a seat warmer who smiles and

nods in agreement," she blogged, announcing her resignation from the board.

Taylor rejected the idea that council was simply trying to shut Di Muccio up.

"You want vigorous debate, you want discussion and lots of different and strong opinions, but there is a standard to hold yourself to, which is do it respectfully and stick to the facts," he said.

Council voted last week to defer Rust-D'Eye's legal options and instead asked Di Muccio to stop speaking "in a disrespectful manner" and stop posting "inaccurate information."

In response, Di Muccio hired a lawyer.

"Unless an immediate resolution is reached, I am instructed to commence a judicial review application," lawyer Darryl Singer informed council.

"I won't be a shrinking violet," Di Muccio told the Star.

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