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Letter to the Editor

York Region Media Group

[RE: Aurora council must move past old quarrels](#)

As a newspaper that champions transparency and accountability in government, The Banner's recent editorial concerning the Town of Aurora's response to the Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation (SLAPP) ruling by Ontario Superior Court Master Thomas Hawkins is both perplexing and disappointing.

Master Hawkins ruled that a defamation lawsuit authorized by the previous council in Aurora, paid for with taxpayer money and subsequently abandoned, was an attempt to stifle public debate and silence political criticism in the weeks leading up to the municipal election. In reaching his finding, Master Hawkins awarded damages to the injured parties in excess of \$20,000.

In response to this ruling, Councillor Michael Thompson has put forth a motion asking staff to provide information concerning SLAPP legislation, in an effort to prevent a future occurrence and to better safeguard the interests of our residents.

Far from "revisiting lingering personal conflicts," Councillor Thompson's motion is a reasoned and prudent approach to ensure that members of the public are able to have their voices heard, without fear of legal reprisal from elected officials. Many communities, including the City of Markham, are seeking clarification on SLAPP lawsuits in order to protect public comment and debate from unwarranted legal action.

Public participation in municipal affairs is not only necessary to running government accountably, it is critical. While criticism can often be negative and difficult to accept, our constituents have a right to be heard.

The defamation lawsuit at the heart of this issue started at Town Council. It is entirely appropriate that it end there as well, with full disclosure to our residents. We have a responsibility to our community, both ethically and financially, to discuss what happened and be accountable to the people who voted us into office. While The Banner's coverage of this issue is commendable, it is Council, not the media that is accountable to residents.

In only two years, our Council has moved forward on a number of initiatives, including a new Strategic Plan, a new community space dedicated to youth, a new multi-purpose sports field, a stronger agreement with our Cultural Centre to provide arts and culture services and streaming media via Internet to better engage our residents.

Many of these initiatives were debated by previous Councils. Completing the work that they started is not dwelling on the past, it is simply good governance.

Mayor Geoffrey Dawe
Town of Aurora