

Harrison, speaking as citizen, accuses publisher of lies and more

Editor's Note: Footnote numbers in the article refer to additional information provided at the end of the article.

Excerpts from Sally Harrison's comments at the October 15 Vernonia City Council meeting were provided in the last issue of *The Independent*. Here are her comments verbatim.

Mayor Sally Harrison: "Now for topics from the floor. Mr. Whiteman, would you take over the gavel for a moment? As president of the council." (Handed gavel to Councilor Whiteman and left the podium to stand in front of city recorder).

"This is topics from the floor, my name is Sally Harrison, I live at 1689 N. Mist Drive."

"This is a very sad day for Vernonia. Dick Kline has decided to resign, and you know what, I don't blame him. I believe he could have and would have continued to do his job admirably that we've handed him; fixing our mess, getting to know us all with our quirks and demands, and the abuse *The Independent* has handed out on a daily basis, but for one thing. He told me and I quote, "Not one of my family wants to live in Vernonia." I'm sure they are sick and tired of the stress their husband and father have been subjected to. This is truly a bad day for Vernonia and I'm ashamed for all the good people in town. We deserve better than this. Let's take a little walk down Memory Lane. June of 2006, Robyn Bassett quit, the council contacted the LOC, they had three candidates apply for interim administrator. Interviews were held and Dick Kline was chosen. He came to us at a difficult time, people were up in arms over the sewer project and the Learning Center, members of the Planning Commission were ready to quit,

city staff was upset and council needed answers concerning the solvency of the city finances¹. In other words, Dick had his work cut out for him. And, you know what? He took it all and dealt with it all. Not only was the Public Works Committee formed but all committees were strengthened and legitimized. A new chart of accounts was made so that even someone as financially illiterate as me will be able to understand it. Our Planning Commission is strong. Dick was in the process of streamlining city staff. There were other projects in the works that would have benefited the city. Dick has set us on the path of proper planning, including, but not limited to; streets, stormwater, and our parks systems. He has reigned in excessive spending. Due to his expertise we rarely have to avail ourselves of legal counsel. Expenses of running the city have been pared down to the bone. Dick has set us on a system to get us out of debt and we're on the road to re-solvency, no small feat. Accountability has been Dick's middle name. There is nothing, and I repeat nothing, that happens at city hall that he hasn't informed, in detail, the council. He has sought our advice and we've sought his. What a joy it has been to go to his office with an idea and be able to discuss it at length with somebody who has answers. And, we haven't even been given the opportunity to take advantage of Dick's greatest strength, which is marketing. No, we won't be given the chance, because of this (holding a copy of *The Independent*). Noni Andersen called me last week saying she was concerned about where the blame would lie over this whole matter. This is where the blame lies, at her doorstep. (Slamming down a stack of *The Independent* on the table next to her.) In my opinion, the biggest mistake that Noni Andersen ever made was turning the newspaper over to Clark McGaugh. It was like giving a five year old a loaded gun. the power, but not the wisdom, to use it wisely. In my opinion, Clark is a vindictive, small-minded, short-sighted, little man who has not had the best welfare of Vernonia's citizens at heart. This reign

of intimidation started with an inadvertent printing of unapproved Learning Center minutes referring to *The Independent* as biased. Apology given, not good enough. We didn't grovel and beg for forgiveness. Then things really ramped up when Dick sent Clark a letter telling him he couldn't have access to city hall until he could conduct himself in a reasonable manner. Now who did Dick think he was not to take verbal abuse from Clark McGaugh? Didn't he remember you don't cross someone who buys ink by the barrel? The whole issue of the background check came into play. Feeling the council was derelict Clark did his own research, and, aha, eureka, he found something. Okay, nothing he could print because it was a rumor supplied by those who wish to be nameless². But, one can't not use a perfectly good rumor, so Clark hit the streets and started his whisper campaign: Lies, half truths, innuendos, sly references. In the meantime, he tried to disrupt the workings of city hall by inundating them with public records requests³. Why, because they can. Not one article has been produced from all these requests to my knowledge⁴. The latest request was for the names of all the applicants for the open position at city hall. He also requested a complete list of phone calls made. Your guess is as good as mine as to what they plan to do with this information. They keep up the pressure by calling daily to find out where Dick is. They must be keeping his calendar. They also feel if he's not at city hall he's not working. Keep up the pressure. Like vultures sitting on a dead limb waiting for a mis-step. They don't care what would be best for Vernonia and it's future. Revenge, plain and simple. They have the power of the press to extract their pound of flesh and they're using it. You decide. Betty Vaughn of the Country Kitchen told me that she lost the sale of her business after prospective buyers read *The Independent*. What do you think people outside of Vernonia think of us when they read *The Independent*? Do you think they feel we know what we are doing? Do you think they will in-

vest in any manner in us? You see they think *The Independent* is a legitimate paper with a true story to tell. Clark, you may think you have won but in truth we've all lost. I apologize to Dick Kline and his family for all that they've been put through. And I thank you, Dick Kline, for getting us to a much better place in the road than before you came to Vernonia and my hope is you'll stay long enough for us to replace you. A difficult proposition when you consider who'll want the job when they find out how you've been treated. (Clapping from some members of the audience, then Harrison retook her place as Mayor.)

"The Consent Agenda..."

Clark McGaugh spoke, "Is that all the topics from the floor?"

Harrison, "Topics from the floor, go ahead."

McGaugh, "Clark McGaugh, Publisher of *The Independent*, said, "I stand by what we printed." He went on to say that he did share some facts with the council⁶ and that, "I spread no rumors. No rumors, it's all

facts." McGaugh finished with "I'm proud of our paper."

Footnotes:

¹ *The Independent* would also like information concerning the city's finances but have been unable to get clear answers.

² This appears to refer to the information shared with council. See the actual article from the Ontario paper on page 20.

³ The April 24, 2007, letter from City Administrator M.R. "Dick" Kline to Clark McGaugh told McGaugh, "you should only make requests to City of Vernonia staff and their volunteers via public information requests submitted to City Recorder Kate Conley." For this reason all requests have been in writing for information that used to be readily available.

⁴ Sally Harrison's signature signing the 20 acre parcel over as collateral was included in the June 7 issue of *The Independent* after Harrison denied using the 20 acres as collateral. This is just one example of information that was obtained via a public record request being used in an article.

Lawsuit topic at improper meeting

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who feels motivated to defame and try and hurt individuals and it can and may end up in civil litigation. My question to you, as the city council, is would you like me to pursue this further with our legal counsel and report back to you? Because it's a serious problem."

Councilor Brett Costley said, "I would like to know, basically, what the cost would be, what the remedies would be, potential downside would be as far as (last few words not understandable).

Kline said, "This doesn't have to result in litigation, necessarily. There can be another letter. He doesn't respond very well to those. But it could be a cease and desist, but there is a very serious problem with his conduct, his untruthfulness and misrepresentation of issues."

Councilor Shirlee Daughtry said, "You know, my own opinion is that it needs to stop. It's got to stop. But I don't know, Dick, it's scary, he's scary. He doesn't get it, he just doesn't get it and I don't know if

we're...He's like a loose cannon.

Kline said, "But, that's not really..."

Mayor Sally Harrison interrupted Kline, saying, "Well, I think that what this action is is that we would want him to pursue the possibilities, find out and answer the questions that we might bring up tonight and get some answers and get back to us. That's all we're asking for right this moment. I think we need some answers on what it would cost, what the outcome would be, what the fallout might be and we'd only get that through legal counsel so my recommendation is to pursue it and find a good example for us.

(The sounds are heard of at least three voices saying "I agree," or "yes.")

Harrison said, "Then that, oh...is that all you need from us?"

Kline said, "That's all I need to know."

Harrison said, "Okay, then this executive session is closed."

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