

Local News

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Sherbrooke workplace reforms

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Submitted a notice of proposal at the council meeting that evening, urging the Municipality to seek external mediation services to address the “tense climate” at City Hall.

Sherbrooke councillor Marc Denault resigned as president of the Société de transport de Sherbrooke (STS) on Jan. 23, citing lies and pressure that led to his decision. He stated, “There are people who lied, who pushed me to resign and I’m the one experiencing the collateral damage the most.”

Denault, who served as president for 10 years and as vice president for four years prior, resigned after being excluded from a meeting with provincial Minister of Transport and Sustainable Mobility Geneviève Guilbault by Sherbrooke Mayor Évelyne Beaudin’s office.

According to Denault, the mayor’s chief of staff, Steve Roy, informed him that Guilbault’s office chose to exclude him. However, Guilbault denied any involvement, saying, “In no case did I or my team say that we didn’t want Mr. Denault to attend,” and emphasized, “It’s up to [the mayor’s] discretion to invite who she wishes.”

Denault added, “I resigned because the trust relationship was broken and because they lied to me. I resigned because of my values.” Denault’s resignation was followed a few weeks later by those of Roy and Philippe Pagé, coordinator of communications for the mayor of Sherbrooke.

In April, Councillor Danielle Berthold resigned as chair of the city executive committee after receiving a phone call from Beaudin, which she interpreted as threatening. On the evening of April 8, Berthold informed Beaudin of her intention to vote against a new pool tax. In response, Beaudin stated, “When we’re on the executive committee, we need to stick together, and if not, there will be consequences.” Berthold considered this a threat, stating, “I don’t do threats.”

Beaudin confirmed the conversation to The Record, explaining, “I told [Berthold] that in life, when you make decisions, it comes with consequences, and when you change sides, there are always consequences. When you vote to break the budget, there are consequences.”

A few days after leaving the executive committee, Berthold was relieved of her role as chairperson of Sherbrooke council by Beaudin. The mayor justified the decision saying it was more efficient for the council chair to have a seat on the executive.

The mandate for CMQ’s involvement was established by a unanimous resolution from Sherbrooke’s city council on Feb. 23. The commission’s intervention, authorized under Article 21.1 of the Municipal Commission Act, involved meetings with over 30 individuals, including the mayor, council members, and city officials, as well as a review of numerous documents.

The CMQ highlighted governance challenges, focusing on the city council, executive committee, and various commissions. For the city council, the structure and operation of the council sessions were scrutinized. Issues included inadequate debate formats, lack of effective tools for tracking progress, and insufficient planning.

In the executive committee, operations were found to be inefficient, marked by micromanagement, back-and-forth processing of dossiers, and a lack of transparency. The “workshop” part of meetings was particularly criticized for its non-standard procedures, including having important topics placed in the “miscellaneous” category instead of being clearly identified in the agenda. Regarding committees and commissions, the CMQ report identified inconsistencies and inefficiencies, citing a lack of clear mandates and issues of undue influence by the executive committee.

The CMQ report also addressed the deteriorating workplace climate.

Instances of inappropriate use of mobile devices during meetings, disrespectful behaviour, and personal attacks were reported. This behaviour contributed to a toxic atmosphere, undermining the credibility and morale of city staff.

Elected officials were found to interfere in administrative tasks, often dictating the content of decision summaries and bypassing established communication protocols. Additional factors such as early media disclosures, a centralized governance model, and breaches of confidentiality were cited as contributors to the strained work environment.

The CMQ put forth several recommendations aimed at improving governance and the work environment in Sherbrooke. These include completing the council’s strategic planning to establish a common vision and prioritize projects. The process for managing dossiers should be clarified and standardized, incorporating recommendations from previous optimization reports. A collective tracking tool, such as a dashboard, should be implemented for better oversight of project progress.

The city’s regulations should be revised to ensure orderly and respectful council meetings, including the right to reply and penalties for non-compliance. The executive committee’s procedures should be reformed by eliminating the workshop part of meetings and ensuring all dossiers are properly documented and discussed.

The structure and mandate of committees should be reevaluated to ensure they function efficiently under clear, simplified rules. The authority of committee chairs should be enhanced to maintain order and decorum, supported by appropriate training. An independent governance commissioner should be established to oversee compliance with governance mechanisms and handle complaints.

The CMQ advised that Sherbrooke develop an action plan to prioritize and

implement these recommendations. The plan should be approved by the city council to ensure commitment and accountability.

Sherbrooke’s preliminary response

The City of Sherbrooke responded to the CMQ’s report in a June 19 release, summarized below:

The CMQ members’ mandate was to recommend actions aimed at resolving the sometimes-difficult relationships between council members and between council members and the administration, thereby improving the City’s operations.

The document submitted by the CMQ at the end of its mandate was presented to the municipal council during its regular meeting on June 18. It contains observations and 17 recommendations. These recommendations were presented during the public plenary committee meeting on June 18.

In response, the municipal council has established a transpartisan political-administrative governance committee tasked with proposing an action plan, including prioritizing solutions, to respond to the CMQ’s recommendations. This action plan will be submitted to the municipal council for approval. The composition of this committee will be confirmed at a subsequent municipal council meeting. The committee is required to report back to the council in September.

The Record emailed Sherbrooke’s communications department June 19 asking for more information on the composition of new committee.

According to a media representative, the committee will be composed of two independent elected officials, two elected officials from Sherbrooke Citoyen (including at least one who is on the executive committee), three members of the administration, and one external member from outside the City of Sherbrooke. The members have yet to be selected, they will be named at a future council meeting, the rep said.

Breakfast Talks

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Smile and a theme topic, Pinard is described by the group as a ray of sunshine possessing knowledge and compassion. The CABMN is proud to offer this activity in collaboration with the Centre des Femmes Memphremagog.

The Centre des Femmes Memphremagog (CFM) has a 31-year history of involvement with the women of the Memphremagog MRC, as a non-profit organization (NPO). It is financed mainly by the Programme de soutien aux organismes communautaires of the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux du Québec. It also receives financial support from Centraide Estrie and

community donations. It is a member of the “Regroupement des centres de femmes du Québec, l’R.”

The organization’s mission is to improve women’s living conditions and promote their autonomy by acting on both personal and community attitudes. Its objectives are to bring together women from the Memphremagog region, to defend and promote their interests, to make them aware of their rights and obligations, and to organize and maintain activities that enable women to undertake, with others, a process of autonomy on various levels: socio-economic, emotional, legal and political.

Organized by the CABMN senior services team, fifteen participants

gathered for a warm welcome at the Camping Nature Plein Air with mimosas served, followed by waffles, fruit brochettes, cream puffs, cheese and bacon with maple syrup topped with coffee from the local Torrefacteur brewers! The topic delivered by Chantal for the last week was on “guilty pleasures.” The group came up with some very interesting deductions as well as some thought-provoking discoveries that gave everyone some food for thought to take home with them. The group left around 11:30 a.m. with the promise to resume these rendez-vous sessions that fire participants up and move them forward, again in the fall.

“As women, we need these sessions together to reflect upon a variety of

powerful topics and we treasure the opportunity to express our opinions and ideas,” said Lucie Beaudoin who not only coordinates Senior Services through the CABMN but also participates in the group. “We feel very happy to collaborate with the Centre des Femmes Memphremagog (CFM) and value the leadership of Chantal Pinard,” she added.

The number of dynamic women who gather for these sessions clearly demonstrates the interest and commitment to the group and to themselves. This is just another new initiative of the CABMN and one that they plan to continue after the summer break is over.

For more information on CABMN programs visit: www.cabmn.org