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Dear Town Council of Sackville (NB),

When I stood up at the town council meeting last night and asked “Can I speak?” I already knew the answer. I had a sliver of hope that rules would waive for youth voices. I made a mistake. But my mistake was not in rising to speak, it was in asking to. Instead of asking for permission to speak, what I meant to say was:

“I am shaking. I can feel my heart beating in my whole body.

I am speaking now because historically speaking out of turn is what it takes to make changes.

Because of governance structures that dictate who gets to speak and when, and because those governing voices are not acting swiftly enough for a livable climate, the youth of Sackville held a strike from school on March 15 alongside youth across the Earth. We did not get on the agenda in time to present ourselves tonight, but on March 15 we made a whole day out of our presentation. In civil structures that do not have an avenue for consideration of youth voices, we created the space for our voices to be heard. Over 250 youth undertook an education strike (that has had educational consequences for many of us) to make our call to action heard by our governing bodies. Tonight you discuss our concerns, and next meeting you vote.

There are a few things I feel necessary to add to tonight’s discussion for clarification and emphasis:

For the youth of Sackville, declaring a climate emergency and implementing rigorous and adequate policy on climate change are one and the same. Declaring a Climate Emergency is symbolic and gives the Town of Sackville the optics of being a climate leader, but that is not the bulk of its weight nor our root intention. By declaring a Climate Emergency, all doings by governance operate under a climate lens. Declaration of a Climate Emergency is met with rigorous and adequate climate policy. This is what the youth of Sackville are calling for.

When residents like Sabine present a call for help and a call to action on flood prevention, mitigation, and response that is complex, multi-governmental and dynamic, I want my council to not just agree that we are at disastrous risk. I want my town council to say “Yes, AND..”. Tonight you did not give Sabine an actionable response to the crisis she clearly detailed. Agreement is not enough. I do not want you to be amicable. I want you to stop what you are doing and shake in the reality of this. In my opinion Sabine’s presentation should not have left the discussion table without a future motion or some form of actionable response – some assurance that you will move beyond awareness. In a state of Climate Emergency, Sabine’s call to action would have been granted a more rigorous and practical response. This is what the youth of Sackville are calling for.

When a town councilor says that they are a pessimist about climate change, that they think we are doomed, and that do not like to think about their children’s future because they don’t know what it will look like, they are saying that they do not believe the youth in this room will have a livable future. When

you say we are doomed I feel youth around me crumple. I do not want a pessimist in power because I do not want a town councilor that has given up. I want a town councilor that recognizes that we can imagine more climate just futures because time and time again governments have created climate policies that re-imagine the way we operate on this Earth. I want a town councilor that realizes that if those policies had been implemented we would have significantly mitigated the global warming and ecological destruction trajectory we are currently on. I want a town councilor that will push for such adequate climate policy to be made more rigorous, and *actually* implemented. I want a town councilor that will do everything they can to protect our futures – no matter how scary or big the fight. This is what the youth of Sackville are calling for.

The juxtaposition between the energy and emotion present on March 15 to the atmosphere of town council chambers is stifling. As expected, there is dilution of our voices when our movement goes from grassroots organizing community and event, to council boardroom. Tonight's meeting was unreflective of the intensity of the fear and passion that was held by youth on March 15. I am grateful to Town Councilors who spoke in favor of addressing youth concerns – I see that you are trying and that some of you do feel this climate crisis with conviction. But I am not speaking to thank you for simply realizing and feeling the gravity of the climate crisis and for doing your job of representing your constituents on this issue. I am speaking to say: please do not forget or dilute the urgency of our voices as you go forward. I want governing bodies that bring the urgency, the messiness, and the emotion of the climate crisis into our political structures. Only in doing this will our policy be adequately informed and motivated. This is what the youth of Sackville are calling for.

*They told us it was over,
they told us the world gets colder,
they told us "too much" on our shoulders,
but we believe that we will win.
We believe that we will win.*
– Dream Defenders

Sincerely,
Hanna Longard