

Councillor Bill Evans statement in support of proposed bylaw changes to permit abattoir during Sackville Town Council meeting of January 11, 2021.

I received a significant number...of additional comments since our last meeting, but I haven't heard anything substantially new either for or against the rezoning request. So, while I am open to new evidence, I just haven't received any yet. However, I have been doing a lot of thinking and investigating and I would like to make some additional points.

It seems to me that what makes this case different from all other contentious issues we face, like demolishing buildings, is that it's not about disagreeing about something that is definitely either/or, but rather, it's about our prediction about what might happen. The people who object to the proposal think that this operation will negatively affect the quality of life as far away as downtown and that smells and noises will be so bad that it will negatively affect residents hundreds of metres away and result in a reduction to their property values.

I understand these concerns and I understand the fear that comes with this uncertainty, but my task is to calmly and rationally evaluate the probability of this happening and I've concluded that the probability is low for two main reasons. The first key point to note is that no one wants it to turn out badly. Unlike my previous example of a building where the outcomes were mutually exclusive, either the building remains or the building is demolished and either way someone is upset, with this case there is a real possibility here that all parties will be satisfied with the same outcome.

It's my understanding that the proponent hopes to have a butcher shop on the premises. He wants to run a business that attracts customers to come to the site. The person who owns the building rents space in the same building to another tenant. He's going to want to keep his tenant satisfied. Council wants to ensure that citizens of this town continue to enjoy the quality of life that we have. I know that this councillor would not be in favour of this development if he believed that things were going to be nearly as bad as some people fear. So, no one has an interest in an unpleasant outcome. Everybody involved has an interest in this operation being attractive and successful. In addition, regulations require that it operate safely and all the yucky aspects of this operation take place indoors.

The second reason I think that things won't turn out badly is because other operations that I am familiar with did not. The two that I investigated are in Memramcook and in Sussex. Both are much larger operations with multiple buildings and yet they both have a retail store on their premises. Some people have made the point that these other operations are located outside their town and while this is true, they're not within town limits, it is a significant fact that they both have homes on either side of the business and directly across the road, much closer than is the case in our industrial park and they are both attractive operations in attractive neighbourhoods.

I have a job to do and it's not about what I like. In fact, my personal opinion might surprise people. It's about what is in the best interests of the town. There are very real concerns that have been raised and as I said before, I had them too, but I did my homework and I am satisfied that the probability that things will go terribly wrong is small and it is much more likely that this business will turn out to be like other abattoirs I am familiar with, an innocuous addition to the business community. I expect that in the future, people will wonder what all this fuss was about.

It seems to me to be unfair to refuse to allow someone to establish a legitimate business because of a remote possibility something might go terribly wrong. We don't prevent people from building homes because they might become crack houses or prevent people from opening a restaurant because it might serve tainted food. I believe that there is a very small probability that there will be problems and a high probability that it will be like other abattoirs which operate satisfactorily.

And, and this is our ace in the hole, if things do go wrong, our development agreement can ensure that it gets corrected. If the proponent fails to comply with provincial health regulations, we could make him or ultimately shut down the operation by retracting the zoning approval.

Now, I spent hours preparing a written statement explaining the reasons why I had come to the conclusion to support these motions and I read it at our last meeting. And frankly, I was surprised that only two parties who signed the petitions have asked to speak to me to ask me questions or provide me with new information. Some of these people are friends, they're neighbours, they're people

I work with. Some of these people probably voted for me. Do they really think that I would knowingly do something bad for the community? I take this job seriously and if I've got it wrong, I want to know about it. But what I have to do is what's right even if it's unpopular.

Finally, I'd like to address concerns that have been raised about the process. I know I did my due diligence. Each member of council had the opportunity and has the obligation to be informed, to get all the information they require to make an informed decision. Council conducted its business on this issue publicly the same as we do for all other zoning requests including another one that's on the agenda tonight. We post our agendas publicly in advance of meetings. We share the minutes and the video recordings of all our meetings after the fact so they're available to anyone who's interested. The town followed all the established procedures, regulations and policies.

The reality is the world we live in is full of people unlike me who attended council meetings for years before I was a councillor. Most people just aren't interested in council's business. The majority of eligible voters don't even vote in municipal elections and while they are free to make that choice, I think this lack of citizen engagement is a chronic problem.

Now, I would be happy to consider improving our process, but I don't think process is the problem in this case. We have a whole lot of input from a whole lot of people and virtually none of whom live within 100 metres of this site, so I think we've heard a lot of feedback, so people found out about it. But something I've noticed over the years is people tend to criticize the process only when they disagree with the outcome. These are the same processes we have used for years and I've never heard anyone criticize them except when they take issue with the outcome. So, it seems to me that if you're satisfied with the process in the vast majority of cases, and we use the same process in all cases, then your issue is not with the process.

Now, I'm going to close with one point and I want to be very careful that you note this, I am not equating these two cases, but I do want to point out that we have all seen a recent example of unfair criticism of process that resulted in very unpleasant consequences. So, let's all be careful and respectful.

As I said, I'm open to improving any of our processes, but there has been no malfeasance here. We followed due process openly, publicly. We had a public hearing of objections and I for one, considered additional submissions long after the cut-off date and now, for the reasons I have stated and restated and supported by the evidence and my sense of fairness and my assessment of probabilities, I will be supporting this motion again tonight.

Thank you.