

Principles
Integrity

City of Pickering
Integrity Commissioner's
Recommendation Report
Regarding Complaints Against Councillor Robinson

June 16, 2025

Executive Summary:

- [1] This report is the result of complaints arising following Councillor Robinson's Ward 1 Town Hall held on November 28, 2024 (the Town Hall), at which she publicly made several claims about the City of Pickering which were flagrantly misleading or categorically untrue. In particular:
- That fees of up to \$650 are charged to those issued Trespass Notices
 - That City staff skewed survey results to achieve desired results
 - That the City has spent over \$20M on consultants
 - That Council's "gift" policy allows members to accept generous gifts from developers and so long as they are passed along to others, and that there is no requirement to account for them or disclose them publicly
- [2] The Councillor also encouraged the attendees to provide their personal information on a sign-in sheet, knowing that such practice is contrary to the relevant privacy legislation.
- [3] We find that the Councillor's conduct in this regard breached the Code of Conduct.

Process

- [4] In conducting this investigation, Principles *Integrity* applied the principles of procedural fairness and was guided by the complaint process set out under the Code of Conduct.
- [5] This fair and balanced process includes the following elements:
- Reviewing the complaints to determine whether they are within scope and jurisdiction and in the public interest to pursue, including giving consideration to whether the complaints should be restated or narrowed, where this better reflects the public interest;
 - Notifying the Respondent, and providing her with the opportunity to respond in full to the allegations;

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- Reviewing the Code of Conduct and other relevant policies and documentation, including watching and listening to a video recording of the meeting in question, and interviewing relevant witnesses as necessary; and,
- Providing the Respondent with the opportunity to review and provide comments to the Integrity Commissioner's Preliminary Findings Report, before submitting our Recommendation Report, although none were received despite our requests.

Code Provisions

[6] The relevant provisions of the Council Code of Conduct are as follows:

Policy Objective:

2. Attaining an elected position within one's community is a privilege which carries significant responsibilities and obligations. Members of Council are held to a high standard as leaders of the community and are expected to become well informed on all aspects of municipal governance, administration, planning and operations. They are also expected to carry out their duties in a fair, impartial, transparent, professional, and respectful manner.

3. All Members of the Council of the City of Pickering are committed to protecting and promoting the well-being and best interests of the citizens of the City with the highest standards of integrity and ethical conduct. This Code is an affirmation of this commitment. It recognizes and is based on the following key statements of principle:

- a) Members are committed to performing their duties of office, and arranging private affairs, in a manner that promotes public confidence in the integrity of Member and respect for Council as a whole.
- b) Members are committed to acting and being seen to act with integrity and impartiality that will bear the closest scrutiny.
- c) Members are committed to serving their constituents in a conscientious and diligent manner.
- d) Members are committed to working with City officials and staff in a conscientious and respectful manner.

The Complaints

- [7] This investigation arises out of a complaint submitted by Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) Marisa Carpino regarding certain actions of Councillor Robinson alleged to breach the Code of Conduct (the "Code").

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- [8] The complaint alleges that, in the course of the Councillor's Ward 1 Town Hall meeting on November 28, 2024 (the Town Hall), she publicly made several claims about the City of Pickering which were flagrantly misleading or categorically false.
- [9] In particular, at the Town Hall meeting, the Councillor stated:
- That fees of up to \$650 are charged to those issued Trespass Notices
 - That City staff skewed survey results to achieve desired results
 - That the City has spent over \$20M on consultants
 - That Council's "gift" policy allows members to accept generous gifts from developers and so long as they are passed along to others, and that there is no requirement to account for them or disclose them publicly
- [10] At the Town Hall, the Councillor also encouraged the public attending the Town Hall to provide their personal information on a sign-in sheet, knowing that such practice is contrary to the relevant privacy legislation.
- [11] The Councillor's action, using the Community Centre for the purposes of disparaging and spreading misinformation and false information about the City at her Town Hall, constituted an abuse of the City's resources.
- [12] It is alleged that Councillor Robinson's conduct as particularized above breached the Code of Conduct.

Background and Context

- [13] On November 28, 2024 Councillor Robinson hosted a Town Hall community meeting for Ward 1 residents at the George Ashe Community Centre (the Community Centre) in the City of Pickering.
- [14] The Community Centre is a City-owned and operated facility, which members of Council are able to book through their office.
- [15] When a Councillor books a City-owned facility for a Town Hall or other proper municipal purpose, the City incurs the cost of security services. This service is privately contracted from a third party security company.
- [16] The City incurred the cost of \$350 for private security services for the Councillor's Town Hall. This amount is generally reimbursed out of the Councillor's Communications budget.

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[17] The City has cautioned Councillor Robinson that future Town Hall events may not be reimbursed by the City because the City cannot subsidize violations of the Code of Conduct.

[18] The Town Hall meeting was attended by approximately 60 people and portions of the meeting were recorded and posted on social media.

Statement about fees for Trespass Notices issued

[19] The statement that the City has increased fees for Trespass Notices from \$65 to \$650 is false.

[20] The City has advised that there is *no fee* associated with the issuance of a Trespass Notice.

[21] During our investigation, the Councillor claimed that she was referencing an increase in *potential fines* associated with prosecutions, where these may be pursued by the City as charges under the Nuisance By-law.

[22] Trespass Notices are unrelated to, and not pursued as, charges under the Nuisance By-law.

[23] There is no fee associated with Trespass Notices issued by the City.

[24] It is clear that the Councillor has linked Trespass Notices with potential fines for charges prosecuted under the Nuisance By-law.

[25] We do not find it credible that the Councillor innocently conflated a Trespass Notice with the fine available following a prosecution under a Nuisance By-law.

[26] We note that the Councillor is two+ years into the position, and is also a professional Paralegal.

[27] We find that the Councillor falsely claimed that the City had increased fees for Trespass Notices to \$650, in breach of her obligation to adhere to the high standards of behaviour set out in the Code of Conduct, and the key statements of principle set out in section 3 of the Code.

Statements about surveys conducted by City staff

[28] During the Town Hall, the Councillor appeared to be pushing for a return to the City using a local print publication for its notices and public engagement.

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- [29] She stated that the City's reliance on its online presence – LetsTalkPickering and other various social media platforms utilized by the City – resulted in decisions being based on small samplings.
- [30] She stated during the Town Hall: *"Sometimes only 5 surveys got filled out in a population of 100,000; we're basing decisions on 5 people's opinions"*. The Councillor went on to repeat several times that only 5, or sometimes 5 or 6, people responded.
- [31] City staff have worked hard to ensure surveys reach a broad sampling of the population and take care to generate public engagement.
- [32] We are satisfied that staff, along with consultants retained with experience in survey development, collection, and analysis conduct surveys in a manner which ensures that decisions are based on reliable and authentic community feedback.
- [33] During our investigation, the Councillor claimed that she was 'questioning survey methodology and transparency' in response to concerns raised by residents.
- [34] The City has demonstrated to us that a range of tools are used to gauge community support for initiatives, of which surveys are merely one. Those surveys are largely completed online through LetsTalkPickering, and typically generate responses numbering in the hundreds.
- [35] Also, as surveys are collected digitally, we are satisfied that staff are not able to 'skew' results from the source.
- [36] The LetsTalkPickering platform also retains a record of the survey and all responses, making all reporting by staff about the engagement results easily verifiable.
- [37] The Councillor provided us with nothing in support of her bald assertion.
- [38] We find that the Councillor's claims regarding the City's reliance on surveys which generated as few as 5 or 6 responses, and the claim that the City is making its decisions on the basis of such surveys, is categorically false.
- [39] We find that the statement is made to discredit the City, its processes and its decisions.

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[40] We find that the Councillor's false statements about the City's surveys is in breach of her obligation to adhere to the high standards of behaviour set out in the Code of Conduct, and the key statements of principle set out in section 3 of the Code.

Claim that the City has spent over \$20M on consultants in 2024 alone

[41] During the Town Hall, the Councillor stated, and repeated, that the City has spent over \$20M on consultants in 2024 alone.

[42] This statement is categorically false.

[43] In fact, the actual amount spent in 2024 on consultants by the City is \$3,459,357. which is a \$1M reduction from 2023.

[44] The Councillor has not provided us with information to support her \$20M claim. On the contrary, Report FIN 02-25 from the Director, Finance & Treasurer, which was on the public Council Meeting agenda of January 27, 2025, shows the actual cost of consultants for the years 2022 through 2024:

Analysis of City's Consulting & Professional Fees				
Line #	Box A	Actuals 2022	Actuals 2023	Year to Date 2024
Gross Vs. Net Cost				
A	Gross Cost	\$ 2,971,426	\$ 4,511,155	\$ 3,459,357
Net Cost				
B	Property Tax Funded	\$ 2,257,003	\$ 3,211,407	\$ 1,681,732
C = A/B	% Property Tax Funded	75.96%	71.19%	48.61%

[45] Stating, "*we don't need consultants on where to change light bulbs at our community centres*", she called the expenditure (which she inflated to \$20 Million in 2024) a misuse and waste of taxpayer dollars.

[46] During our investigation, Councillor Robinson claimed that she was not specifying any particular timeframe for the \$20M cost, and claimed that, in any event, the fact that the Finance Department was only compiling the data when the Town Hall occurred "*suggests that further financial clarity is needed from City staff*".

[47] We find the Councillor's claim, that the City has spent over \$20M on consultants in 2024 alone, to be purposely false.

[48] We find that the statement is made to discredit and disparage the City and its staff.

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[49] Further, we find her suggestion that further financial clarity is needed from staff to be an attempt to cast aspersions instead of acknowledging her statement to be false.

[50] We find that the Councillor's statement constitutes a breach of the Code and in particular is a breach of her obligation to adhere to the high standards of behaviour set out in the Code of Conduct, and the key statements of principle set out in section 3 of the Code.

Misconstrued the City's "gift" policy

[51] At the Town Hall, the Councillor explained to the attendees that Council's "gift" policy allows members of Council to accept generous gifts from developers without having to account for or disclose these, so long as the Councillor does not use the gift for themselves or their own family.

[52] The Councillor gave the example of a developer giving a member of Council 10 tickets to a Basketball game: if the member goes to the Basketball game and takes two family members, but gives the other 7 tickets away, under the Council "gift" policy, they member only needs to report the 3 tickets used by themselves and their family.

[53] This is categorically false. The City of Pickering Council Code of Conduct¹ contains the following provisions under section 04 Gifts and Benefits:

...

A Gift or Benefit to a Member's Spouse, Child, or Parent that is connected directly or indirectly to the performance of the Member's duties is deemed to be a Gift or Benefit to the Member if provided with the Member's knowledge or solicited by the Member.

...

General Rules on Gifts and Benefits:

04.01 A Member shall not solicit or accept any Gift or Benefit that:

a) is intended to influence, might influence, could reasonably be perceived that it might influence, or is intended to influence, the Member in the performance of the Member's duties as an elected official; or

b) is intended, or could reasonably be perceived that it is intended, as a reward

¹ A refresh of the gift provisions, to be contained in a revised Code of Conduct, has been paused by the Region and Durham's local municipalities' pending the legislature's consideration of Bill 9 (formerly Bill 241).

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for any action or impending action by the Member.

Exceptions:

04.02 Despite section 04 .. 01, a Member may accept the following:

h) food, lodging, transportation, or entertainment lawfully provided by the organizer of a conference, seminar, charity fundraiser, reception, ceremony, cultural event, sporting event, business, or political event where the Member is speaking or attending in an official capacity;

Maximum Acceptable Value:

04.04 Despite anything else in this Code, a Member shall not accept a Gift or Benefit of value greater than \$500.00 and shall not accept from a single source during a 12-month period Gifts and Benefits of total value greater than \$500.00. This dollar-limit does not apply to an item described in paragraph (a), (g), (h), (i), (j) or (l) of section 04.02.

Public Disclosure:

04.05 A Member who receives a Gift or Benefit of value greater than \$200.00, or receives from a single source during a 12-month period Gifts and Benefits of total value greater than \$200.00, shall within 30 days of receipt, file a Disclosure Statement with the City Clerk (Refer to Appendix 1).

04.07 The Disclosure Statement shall set out:

- a) nature of Gift or Benefit;
- b) source;
- c) date received;
- d) circumstances under which Gift or Benefit was given and received;
- e) estimated value;
- f) what the recipient intends to do with Gift or Benefit; and
- g) whether the Gift or Benefit will at some point be provided to the municipality.

04.08 Every Disclosure Statement shall be made a public record and posted on the City's website.

[54] On a plain reading of the “gift” provision, it is clear that a member who receives tickets to an event, can only accept such tickets if they meet the criteria of the policy. There is no provision which allows for the ‘regifting’ of a gift, except to the municipality itself.

[55] It is clear that members cannot accept the tickets and then give them away.

[56] It is also clear that the member accepting the tickets as a gift, and attending the event, is required to report this under the Code by filing a Disclosure Statement, (unless the value of all gifts from that entity for the year does not exceed \$200).

Principles *Integrity*

[57] We find that the Councillor's statements and explanation were a deliberate misrepresentation of the policy.

[58] We find that this constitutes a breach of the Councillor's obligation to adhere to the high standards of behaviour set out in the Code of Conduct, and the key statements of principle set out in section 3 of the Code.

Encouraging attendees to provide their personal information on a sign-in sheet

[59] There was a sign-in sheet at the Town Hall, on which personal information was being collected under the headings:

<u>Ward #</u>	<u>Surname</u>	<u>1st Name</u>	<u>email</u>	<u>phone</u>
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[60] The collection of names along with email addresses and/or phone numbers, which constitutes the collection of personal information pursuant to the privacy legislation in Ontario, is strictly regulated under that legislation.²

[61] The City is obligated to ensure informed consent when it collects personal information from those attending public meetings.

[62] Where informed consent is provided, the information collected under the auspices of a municipality must be safe-guarded against use for another purpose than that for which it was collected and for which consent was given.

[63] The obligations of a municipality, and by extension Councillor Robinson, when collecting personal information are succinctly stated on the website of the Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario:³

[64] "Under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FIPPA) and Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (MFIPPA), government institutions must give notice to people when personal information is collected.

The notice should state:

- the legal authority for the collection
- the reason for the collection

² Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Personal Privacy Act

³ <https://www.ipc.on.ca/en/privacy-organizations/collection-use-and-disclosure-of-personal-information>

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- how they plan to use the information
- who to contact for more information

[65] The Councillor's sign-in sheet provided the following:

Nov.28'24, "Pickering Town Hall Meeting" with Councillor Lisa Robinson
By completing your contact information you agree to receive information from Councillor Lisa Robinson which may be outside of City of Pickering, Ward 1
NOTE - communications may include updates, newsletters and other relative information related to her work and initiatives.

[66] This notice fails, first and foremost, to state the legal authority for the collection of personal information.

[67] An attendee quickly glancing at the sign-in sheet would believe the Councillor is collecting the information in her capacity as the Ward 1 City Councillor.

[68] We find that the notice, rather than informing, risks leading attendees to think that their personal information be subject to appropriate retention and protection by City staff, when it was not.

[69] This same issue of a sign-in sheet potentially collecting personal information, unknowingly placing a legal obligation on the City, was the subject of a complaint against Councillor Robinson in 2023.

[70] In our Recommendation Report of August 14, 2023, we made the following finding:

Privacy Breach

76. One of the complainants raised a concern that the Councillor's mother had collected and retained contact information of attendees at a Town Hall meeting, contrary to the municipality's obligations to maintain confidentiality around personal information that is collected.

77. It has been alleged that the contact information was used for improper purposes (real estate solicitations) by the real estate broker where the Councillor is employed.

78. In her response, the Councillor advised that all information from all Town Hall meetings she held is now under the care of the City of Pickering and confirmed that she does not have any personal information of any attendees, nor has she made copies of any personal information of any attendees.

79. However, it is evident that information was being collected at Town Hall meetings by the Councillor's mother and that information remained in the Councillor's possession for some period of time following the Town Hall.

Principles Integrity

80. By involving her mother in the collection of such information, the Councillor erroneously allowed her mother access to the personal information of her constituents.

81. Making it possible that constituents' personal information thus collected might be used for an improper purpose, such as 'cold-calling' a constituent whose phone number was otherwise unlisted, represents a breach of the Code.

82. It is inappropriate for members of Council, much less their family members, to improperly collect and use personal information about attendees at municipal meetings, whether Town Halls or otherwise.

83. Such conduct breaches both the Confidentiality provision (paragraph 08) and the Use of City Property provision (paragraph 11) of the Code of Conduct.

84. We have confirmed that the Councillor has turned the collected information over to the City Clerk. **She appears to have recognized the impropriety of doing this again in the future.**

85. **Given that Councillor Robinson is an inexperienced member of Council, and this would appear to be a rookie mistake, while it constituted a breach, we do not believe this instance warrants a sanction.**

[emphasis added]

[71] We find that the Councillor's conduct in providing a sign-in sheet, without the proper disclosure to ensure informed consent, and failing to ask City staff to ensure secure custody of the personal information collected, leaves the City exposed to a potential breach of MFIPPA.

[72] This disregard for the City's obligations, on the same issue as previously admonished, runs afoul of the Councillor's obligations under the Policy Objectives.

Summary of Findings:

[73] We find that the Councillor falsely claimed that the City had increased fees for Trespass Notices to \$650.

[74] We find that the Councillor's claims regarding the City's reliance on surveys which have generated as few as 5 or 6 responses, and the claim that the City is making its decisions on the basis of such surveys, is categorically false.

[75] We find the Councillor's claim, that the City has spent over \$20M on consultants in 2024 alone, to be categorically false.

[76] We find that the Councillor's statements and explanation regarding the Council "gifts" policy deliberately misrepresented the policy.

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[77] We find that the Councillor's conduct in providing a sign-in sheet, without the proper disclosure to ensure informed consent, and failing to ask City staff to ensure secure custody of the personal information collected, opened the City to potential breach of MFIPPA.

[78] We find that the Councillor's conduct in all of these matters breached the Code of Conduct.

[79] We find that her conduct in these matters is intentional, with the goal of discrediting and disparaging City staff, and casting doubt on and undermining the public's trust and confidence in the City as a whole, in breach of the Code of Conduct.

Recommendations and Concluding Remarks:

[80] An Integrity Commissioner's investigation report is not simply the conclusion of a technical exercise to determine whether there has been a breach of codified standards of behaviour. Our role is more than simply the task of bringing adjudication to grievances between individuals. As noted below, we see as our highest objective in concluding an investigation to be the making of recommendations that serve the public interest.

[81] The integrity commissioner's role is as much about education as it is about adjudication, so that municipal government can function better, and that members of the public are able to confidently conclude that members of their municipal council are acting with integrity.

[82] Sometimes, where the Member acknowledges inappropriate conduct and commits to meaningful change, a public report may not be necessary. In such cases, only the complainant and Respondent are made aware of the disposition of the matter.

[83] However, where a breach is substantiated, and it is important to daylight the concern, the integrity commissioner, following procedural fairness, submits a public report.

[84] As detailed above, we are of the view that the Respondent's conduct represents a significant breach of the provisions of the Code of Conduct.

[85] Where a pattern of behaviour is observed, it is necessary to consider a sanction.

[86] In our view, a significant change in behaviour is necessary. As such, we believe that a significant sanction is warranted.

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[87] Under the Municipal Act, upon receipt of a recommendation report from the integrity commissioner, Council may impose a reprimand or a suspension of pay for a period of up to 90 days. Unfortunately, unlike Ontario school boards in similar circumstances, municipal councils lack the authority to suspend members from attending a meeting.

[88] While a suspension of pay does not affect the Councillor's ability to attend meetings, it does take away a portion of their salary, as a penalty for violation of the Code.

[89] As in sentencing, an important factor to be taken into consideration in determining a penalty is deterrence.

[90] We note that this is the fifth time that we have had to report publicly in regard to complaints made against Councillor Robinson regarding her conduct, and that on each occasion, a further suspension of pay has been imposed so that, this past December, a 90-day suspension of pay was recommended and imposed.

[91] In circumstances of serious and repeated patterns of egregious intentional misconduct, such as we are confronted with here, it is unfortunate that the most significant sanction we are able to recommend is a 90-day suspension of pay.

[92] Be that as it may, we are recommending that Councillor Robinson's pay be suspended for a period of 90 days.

[93] We therefore recommend:

1. That the remuneration paid to Councillor Robinson be suspended for a period of 90 days;

[94] We wish to conclude by publicly thanking all those who participated in our investigation.

[95] We will be available to introduce this report and respond to questions during the Council meeting at which this report is considered.

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About Principles *Integrity* and the Complaint Process

Principles *Integrity* was appointed the Integrity Commissioner for the City of Pickering on November 15, 2022. We are also privileged to serve as Integrity Commissioner for a number of other Ontario municipalities. The operating philosophy which guides us in our work with all of our client municipalities is this:

The perception that a community's elected representatives are operating with integrity is the glue which sustains local democracy. We live in a time when citizens are skeptical of their elected representatives at all levels. The overarching objective in appointing an integrity commissioner is to ensure the existence of robust and effective policies, procedures, and mechanisms that enhance the citizen's perception that their Council (and local boards) meet established ethical standards and where they do not, there exists a review mechanism that serves the public interest.

The City has as part of its ethical framework a Code of Conduct which is the policy touchstone underlying the assessments conducted in this report. It represents the standard of conduct against which all members of Council are to be measured when there is an allegation of breach of the ethical responsibilities established under the Code of Conduct. The review mechanism contemplated by the Code, one which is required in all Ontario municipalities, is an inquiry/complaints process administered by an integrity commissioner.

Integrity commissioners carry out a range of functions for municipalities (and their local boards). They assist in the development of the ethical framework, for example by suggesting content or commentary for codes of conduct. They conduct education and training for members of council and outreach for members of the community. One of the most important functions is the provision of advice and guidance to members to help sort out ethical grey areas or to confirm activities that support compliance. And finally, but not principally, they investigate allegations that a person has fallen short of compliance with the municipality's ethical framework and where appropriate they submit public reports on their findings, and make recommendations, including recommending sanctions, that council for the municipality may consider imposing in giving consideration to that report.

It is important that this broad range of functions be mentioned in this investigation report. Our goal, as stated in our operating philosophy, is to help members of the Pickering community, indeed the broader municipal sector and the public, to appreciate that elected and appointed representatives generally carry out their functions with integrity. In cases where they do not, there is a proper process in place to fairly assess the facts and, if necessary, recommend appropriate sanctions. In every case, including this one, the highest objective is to make recommendations that serve the public interest, if there are recommendations to be made.

Our role differs from other 'adjudicators' whose responsibilities generally focus, to state it colloquially, on making findings of fact and fault. While that is a necessary component when allegations are made, it is not the only component.

Our operating philosophy dictates the format of this report. The tenets of procedural fairness require us to provide reasons for our conclusions and recommendations, and we have done that. Procedural fairness also requires us to conduct a process where parties can participate in the review and resolution of a complaint.