

Kruger exonerated over Nellie Lunn sale controversy

By Bill Kilpatrick

In November of last year former mayor of Wollaston Township Lynn Kruger, was provided an opinion by the Integrity Commissioner of Wollaston Township, Robert Swayze, stating that she was not in conflict over the potential sale of Nellie Lunn Park to Fred Cox back in 2021/2022. Cox is the first cousin of Kruger's husband, but according to Swayze a "cousin" does not fall under the definition of family as per the Municipal Conflict of Interest Act. The rumoured conflict of interest that had begun prior to 2021 was something that has continued to circulate throughout Wollaston Township to the present day and, according to Kruger, has had a negative impact on her and her family. As reported in the Dec. 1 issue of Bancroft This Week the rumour was confirmed by current Wollaston Councillor JD Fentie, who said he was aware of the rumour that was circulating at that time. Kruger has been adamant that she both spoke to Swayze and received a written opinion from him in 2021 that stated that she was not in a conflict, but she was unable to produce any evidence to back up this claim at that time. Kruger's claim was also denied by Swayze who stated to Bancroft This Week back in November that he had, "no record of any contact from Ms. Kruger regarding the Nellie Lunn matter when it was considered by Council [in 2021]." He also stated "I cannot confirm that I spoke with or received an e-mail on the park issue from her when she was Mayor. If she called me, I would have asked her to follow up with an email since the Municipal Act requires me to receive requests for and provide advice, in writing," adding that, "I did change my [email] address two years ago. For this reason, I'm not sure that I was able to search all my email." As a result of those denials by Swayze and the still ongoing rumours, Kruger decided to file a Freedom of Information request on Nov. 23 with the County of Hastings in an attempt to recover the emails in question. On Jan. 22 she received a response. The emails were shared with Bancroft This Week and clearly show that Kruger did send an email to Swayze on Nov. 16, 2021 at 3:51 p.m. entitled "conflict of interest" inquiring about the potential pecuniary interest regarding the sale of Nellie Lunn Park. The email states, "Some stakeholders are suggesting that I have a conflict of interest in this matter and should declare a conflict because an adjacent property owner happens to be by husband's cousin. Could you please clarify this for me [?]" Swayze replied the same day at 4:05 p.m. stating, "In my opinion the ownership of adjacent land by your husband's cousin is too remote to be considered a pecuniary conflict for you as mayor. You may chair and vote at the meeting." Bancroft This Week verified that the email used in Kruger's 2021 correspondence with Swayze and Swayze's current email are the same, eliminating the prospect that her correspondence was part of Swayze's former email account. For Kruger the idea that her email could not be found by the Integrity Commissioner was very unsettling and "unacceptable." She questioned how she can file a freedom of information request and attain the emails, but the Integrity Commissioner could not find those same files. "Everything they do needs to be documented and needs to be in [the public] record somewhere. [?] I'm disturbed that somebody who is responsible for holding public records for the township couldn't find these documents and I had to file a freedom of information request to receive them," said a dumbfounded Kruger. For her this raised some further questions about his record keeping practices adding, "[?] What else is he going to lose? What else is he not going to be forthcoming with?" Bancroft This Week reached out to Swayze to ask him why the County of Hastings has a copy of the email exchange between himself and Ms. Kruger, but he does not. Swayze responded stating, "I have always backed up all my data during the past 16 years. I have served more than 60 municipalities as Integrity Commissioner." Bancroft This Week sent a follow up email asking him to explain the discrepancy, but did not hear back from him by press time. Over three years later and over one year out of office, the rumours and allegations are still plaguing the former mayor. Recently she was still being accused of a conflict, "After one of the last stories [were published]," said Kruger, "I had a woman beat me up online [saying] "You need to show us proof that you contacted the Integrity Commissioner [in 2021]." Bancroft This Week asked Kruger why she did not release this email back in 2021 and Kruger responded by arguing that if her detractors believed she had a conflict, why did they not file a complaint with the Integrity Commissioner against her? Regardless, the recent revelations show that Kruger was telling the truth and she is happy to finally be able to put all the rumors and conjecture to rest. "It's been quite a long time," said Kruger. When she was asked what the emails in the freedom of information request meant to her, she said, "It clears me of all the nay-sayers and it clears all the gossip that's going on and [hopefully] it can give my family a little peace."