

Town sends business owner cease and desist letter



The town sent owner of Tammy's Family Hair Care Tammy Vardy a cease and desist letter following her posting of these signs in her front windows. / SUBMITTED

By Sarah Sobanski

An outspoken local business owner and the Town of Bancroft could be going head to head in a legal battle over libel allegations. The allegations concern signs posted in the front windows of Tammy's Family Hair Care. Owner Tammy Vardy regularly posts signs, which frequently tackle community issues, but on this occasion they featured messages about the Town of Bancroft's chief administrative officer.

?Hazel Lambe town CAO made the Sunshine List! \$101,717.08 annually \$880.36 taxable benefits! While our people are getting their water shut off! Is she worth it?? the latest signs stated, though they've since been altered slightly.

The salary disclosure comes from the province's record of public sector employees who make more than \$100,000 per year. Also known as the Sunshine List, the disclosure is published annually.

Vardy tells *Bancroft This Week* she puts the signs up to advocate for lower water and sewer rates in Bancroft, or get out important messages, such as when Concerned Citizens of Bancroft and Dungannon is hosting a public meeting.

But her latest series of signs have drawn the ire of the Town of Bancroft, which sent a letter through its lawyer telling her to take them down.

Vardy took to Facebook April 20 to post photos of the cease and desist notice she received from Templeman Menninga LLP on behalf of the town April 18. The letter demands Vardy take down her signs, write a letter of apology to the town's CAO Hazel Lambe and refrain from putting up signs in the future.

?So I got this delivered to me yesterday,? Vardy wrote in her post. ?I've waited to post this until I've heard back from my lawyer. My lawyer chuckled and said they won't get anywhere as I'm stating the truth and simply asking a question. So my posters will remain as well as my blown up letter from the town's lawyer. This is how you tax money is being spent Bancroft! Share the hell out of this! [sic]?

The notice says the signs can be categorized as a public broadcast. It says they're in violation of Ontario Libel and Slander Act meant to ?disparage and defame? Bancroft's CAO.

Vardy said she felt bullied, intimidated and like the town was trying to ?shut [her] up? when she opened the notice. She said this isn't the first time the town has approached her about her signs.

Last summer two town staff members visited Vardy at work while she was with a client, she said.

?It resulted in a verbal altercation where they were repeatedly asked to leave. After approximately five minutes of bickering they left,? she said. She later emailed the CAO and council for ?an explanation and an apology.?

She added, ?When I get my letter of apology, she will get hers.?

Lambe told *Bancroft This Week* she couldn't comment on the situation but that she was ?very proud of the professionalism demonstrated at all times by [her] staff and the accomplishments achieved for the betterment of the town.?

?On behalf of myself as CAO and town staff we appreciate being in positions to support Bancroft as the wonderful community that it is,? Lambe wrote in an email response to the paper.

Vardy has since taken the sign questioning if Lambe was worth her salary down. She said a "select few found it mean-spirited." "It is my right and any taxpayer's right to ask that question but I felt it ruffled a few feathers," she said.

Other than a few negative comments however, Vardy said the response has been positive.

"I'm overwhelmed by the support of the community that are feeling the same way and can't express their concerns or feel they're not listened to."

Vardy said she started putting up the signs last year after Bancroft doubled its water and sewer rates.

"I was asked to post a poster for Bancroft Concerned Citizens and it was just a little piece of paper. I said, 'I can do better than that' and did the whole window," she said.

Vardy said she plans to continue advocating for lower rates, the Concerned Citizens and sharing public information. She noted she would "take down what some may construe as slanderous but the rest [would] remain."

"Commenting on the amount the hydro CEO is making while people are getting their hydro cut off is no different than commenting about the amount the town CAO makes while people get their water cut off," she said. "It's on the Sunshine List for everyone to see. [It's] factual and true."

Vardy said she felt "the letter from the town lawyer should be paid for out of her own personal money and not the taxpayers' as this [was] a waste and [was] clearly public knowledge."

Bancroft This Week reached out to the town's lawyers but they did not respond with a comment before the time of publication.