

Town seeking legal advice on 'freedom' protests downtown

Written By **Paula Brown**

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The Town of Shelburne will be seeking outside legal advice on how to respond to ongoing 'freedom' protests in downtown core.

During their meeting on Monday (Sept. 12), council unanimously supported the motion brought forward by Coun. Lynda Buffett at council's end of August meeting.

'While I don't take issue with the rights of any individual to protest, I do take issue with the extreme ongoing noise that's been impacting both the local businesses downtown and so many of our residents, who are constantly affected by this noise every second Saturday, every single month,' said Buffett.

Since an initial Freedom Convoy protest back in February, Shelburne's Main Street has become a tailgate party for 'freedom' protesters every other weekend. While waving Canadian flags and home-made signs, the protesters blare music, cook food, dress up, and entice horn-honking from passing motorists.

Despite numerous complaints from local residents and business owners, the protests have continued with little disruption over the months.

'Unfortunately, right now our bylaws require a lot more specific enforceability to provide better solutions for these activities,' said Buffett. 'It's clear our bylaws are very outdated and need more current legal scrutiny'.

Buffett noted that she believes the outside advice will allow the town to better equip itself to enforce bylaws more effectively.

Shelburne Deputy Mayor, Steve Anderson seconded the motion to seek outside legal advice in response to the protests.

'Seeking a legal opinion is not passing judgment on one side or the other, it's not to demonize one side or the other, but I think it's important that the town has an understanding of what our legal rights are when it comes to dealing with matters as such and certainly in issues [that] arise down the road,' said Anderson.

Anderson added that the meeting should clarify to both the town and to the public what actions they're allowed to take.

Shelburne Council will receive the legal advice in an in-camera closed session and in turn will share what they feel should be reported to residents in open session.

Denyse Morrissey, chief administrative officer, said any specific directions from the legal advice resulting in specific bylaws or initiatives would be provided in a follow up staff report to council for their consideration.

A date for the legal advice session has not yet been determined.