Editorial

Straying out of the lane

When Halifax Regional Council voted last week to forge ahead with plans to convert Morris Street into a one-way to make room for a protected bike lane, it didn't take long for Nova Scotia Premier Tim Houston to make his displeasure known.

Citing concerns about emergency response and port access, he fired off a formal letter demanding council reverse its decision. Invoking Bill 24 – a new law passed this spring that gives his government unprecedented authority to override municipal transportation decisions –he wrote ominously: "If council proceeds ... the provincial government will be forced to act."

But let's be clear: the issue is not the bike lane.

Premier Houston's ultimatum isn't about a stretch of pavement in the downtown core. It's about something far more consequential, and far more dangerous: the erosion of reasonable, respectful intergovernmental relations in this province.

Nova Scotia's three-tier system of government – municipal, provincial, federal – works not because any one level commands, but because each collaborates. Our system functions, and thrives, on the principle that autonomy and consultation are not mutually exclusive. It is a delicate balance that has endured, often uneasily, for more than a century. What it cannot endure is unilateralism masquerading as leadership.

The real problem is Bill 24 – the legislation passed by Houston's government this spring for exactly this moment. Framed as a transportation measure, the bill grants the province extraordinary authority to intervene in municipal infrastructure decisions, including the power to override local councils and recoup costs from municipalities that don't comply. It wasn't written in theory. It was written for use. And now, the premier is using it – to threaten one of the province's largest and most complex municipal governments with provincial takeover unless it falls in line.

By invoking these new powers, the premier is not just stepping into Halifax Regional Municipality's (HRM) jurisdiction. He is charging into it, boots on, with the force of law. He is signalling that when he doesn't get the answer he wants, he will take the decision away from those closest to the people who will be affected by it.

Let that sink in.

Council, following due process and debate, approved a bike-lane plan designed to improve safety, sustainability and mobility in its urban core. It may not be a perfect plan. It may inconvenience some, frustrate others. But it was democratically decided, through the mechanisms of local governance, by councillors who were elected to represent their communities.

To overrule them from Province House is not a defence of public interest. It is a denial of local democracy.

That should concern every mayor and councillor in Nova Scotia. If it can happen to HRM today, it can happen to any municipality tomorrow. This is not about bikes or buses. It's about power. It's about whether provincial government believes in governing with municipalities or over them.

When collaboration gives way to coercion, when consultation is replaced by threats, we all lose. Democracy loses. The spirit of federation loses. And what replaces it is something colder, more brittle, and far more dangerous: a top-down authoritarian reflex that assumes only one level of government has the right answers. That way lies gridlock, resentment, and eventually revolt.

Look where that road has taken our neighbours to the south. Look where it is taking them still.

What distinguishes Canada – what has always distinguished us – is not our politics, but our political culture. We talk. We deliberate. We compromise. We do not rule by decree. That is our quiet, resilient strength. It is also the reason our system works.

If Premier Houston wants to lead, he must lead by example. Not by threat. Not by edict. But by doing what every strong premier has done before him: pick up the phone, sit down at the table, and make better government through reason – not force.

Because the real threat isn't a bike lane on Morris Street.

It's straying out of the lane of good, collaborative governance – and forgetting why the road exists at all.

Weekly Quote

"Summer afternoon – summer afternoon; to me those have always been the two most beautiful words in the English language."

Henry James

Letters

Kudos for *The Journal*; act on forlorn properties

To the Editor,

First, may I say BRAVO to *The Journal* for the wonderful growth and stimulating stories we anticipate each week!

Secondly, I commend Kelly Post (Letter: Council must act on 'neglected' properties, July 16, 2024) for her passionate plea with regard to our Main Street. After her truly gargantuan effort in saving the life of her heritage home, when many others would have thrown their hands in the air and dozed it in, her frustration is justified.

While I am over the moon each time I drive past that incredible piece of art at the entrance to our town, created by a tenacious group of people (Mulgrave Theatre) who, somewhat like David & Goliath, took on this project and changed the entrance to our town forever, I am frustrated with the collection of sea containers just prior to. I have no problem with sea containers per se, and I understand why folks like them, however they can be just as functional out of site.

In my humble but passionate opinion, the only way anything changes is when we THE PEOPLE decide to do it. There were no government agencies or handouts when our shiretown was created. Blood sweat and tears built this town. Many of us care deeply about the two historic properties on Lower Main Street that despite previous efforts sit empty, forlorn and depressing.

Perhaps its time for us to harness our anger and our strengths into finding a way to revive these two buildings once again. They can once again be the beating heart of our town. We just have to do what Kelly Post did and not take NO for an answer.

Marilyn Sceles
Guysborough

Sparkling show and shine



Len Robertson displays his 'cherry' wheels at the Tracadie & District Volunteer Fire Department's third annual show and shine, which featured cars, trucks and even snowmobiles, in Monastery.on July 12. Hilary Hendsbee

We want your letters!

Got a beef on a local matter or want to send kudos for a job well done? A letter to the editor is the perfect place for sharing your opinion and being part of a public conversation.

Send your letters to news@guysboroughjournal.ca
(Please keep all letters to a **200 word maximum**)

GUYSBOROUGH JOURNAL
KEEPING AN EYE ON THE COAST

Published every Wednesday by Addington Publications Ltd.

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GUYSBOROUGH JOURNAL
KEEPING AN EYE ON THE COAST

PO Box 210
Guysborough, NS
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Tel: 902-533-2851

1 Year Subscription:

Local:
$65 ($56.52 +HST)
Out-of-Area:
$75 ($65.22 +HST)
Digital-Only:
$37 ($32.17 +HST)

We acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada.

Canada

Publications Mail Agreement #40013898
Registration #2526425
Return undeliverable Canadian addresses to:
Circulation Department,
330-123 Main Street,
Toronto, Ontario
M5W 1A1 Email:
circdept@publisher.com