

## COVER STORY

# “Fake outrage” over staff changes at City Hall

by Chris Cooke



Bill Dennis Jr.

“The purple gang wants Sarnia to look dysfunctional”.

That is the view of Sarnia Mayor Mike Bradley responding to questions about a “mass exodus” of senior and middle management from City Hall.

The purple gang is Bradley’s reference to Anne Marie Gillis and her supporters who failed to unseat him in the 2018 municipal election. Gillis, whose campaign colour was purple has been a vocal opponent to staffing changes downtown.

Since the election two years ago 24 people have left the City Hall including Clerk Dianne Gould – Brown and finance director Suzanna Dieleman.

While Gould – Brown’s departure was involuntary, Dieleman left of her own accord after 17 months. She replaced Lisa Armstrong who was finance director in the regime of Margaret Misk –Evans who along with

Gould – Brown filed harassment complaints against the Mayor.

Following Bradley’s re-election in 2018, Misk – Evans took a \$400,000.00 payout and left for Tecumseh.

Gould Brown stayed on under Chris Carter who replaced Misk – Evans but Bradley says Carter has his own “vision” of where he is going with the City and the people he wants around him.

“There is nothing dysfunctional about it,” says Bradley. “We have a new CAO who has his own agenda and is doing an excellent job”.

Bradley noted that Carter has reduced the number of department heads to five from eight or nine and made what he described as “spectacular” adjustments to contend with the economic fallout caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Carter slashed \$2 million from costs by leaving 20 positions unfilled and not hiring 160 summer students and part – time workers.

Gillis reportedly described the unfilled positions as “concerning”. Debbie Martin, a Gillis supporter who has filed Integrity Commissioner complaints against the City, believes the staff turnover at City Hall isn’t normal.

But Bradley says a five per cent attrition rate among 500 employees “isn’t abnormal, it is the new normal”.

And he is supported by Bill Dennis who says he is a good judge of character, and describes Carter as “the real deal” adding, “he came in and saw that City Hall had a lot of people reporting to a lot of people”.

Dennis describes the outrage being expressed by Gillis and Martin as “fake outrage”.

Carter told First Monday that he expects the City will end the year with a surplus possibly as much as \$300,000.00.



Suzanna Dieleman

