

**Michelle Narang**

Redacted as per Section 17 of the FOIP act.

March 17, 2023

**Attention Mayor and Council:**

**RE: Code of Conduct complaint against Mayor Baich.**

**See below –First, I have included my reply to Mayor Baich’s email sent to myself on March 16, 2023 that was in response to my initiating this complaint.**

**Mayor Baich’s words are in italics, my responses are bulleted.**

*FROM MAYOR BAICH: I wanted an opportunity to respond to your email concerning a code of conduct. I attended a charity fundraiser Friday February 26 for the Mountain Rose Women’s Shelter (MRWS) newly branded as Mountain Rose Shelter. I did bid on several items that were available at the auction both silent and live. I won the bid two items from the fundraiser in support of this important charity in our community including a chess set and the gift wrapped "surprise" for men.*

- I’m not questioning your bidding on other items. That’s irrelevant information – I’m not sure what point you are making here. The problem is your bidding on a piece of “art” that is 100% racist and illustrates an absolute disregard for the on-going generational trauma caused through colonialization & genocide in our Country. Rocky Mountain House has a dark and well documented history (very recent history) of racism, specifically anti-Indigenous racism and if community leaders continue to participate in and defend this level of hate and ignorance, that will continue. This is a blatant disregard for the damage that negative-stereotypes and false or appropriated depictions of Indigenous people has on individuals and communities. This perpetuates a false narrative of history that we have been fighting so hard to have re-told; genocide isn’t a chess match and it’s certainly not a novelty item.

The item you purchased should never have seen the light of day – let alone been bid on by the highest ranked member of municipal office. Propagating false history, appropriating culturally sensitive images, etc. It’s all problematic. You seem to be the only person who doesn’t see that – and if you don’t understand, you should consider approaching this type complaint from a space of curiosity rather than defence.

My complaint with regards to your conduct has nothing to do with the organization you were supporting. My complaint is 100% with regards to a member of public office participating publicly in acts of hate and racism. The impact of the exploitation and use of the kind of imagery depicted in the item you purchased is widely researched and reported on. The images are dehumanizing, and this type of 'art' perpetuates a version of 'history' that has upheld oppressive and racist attitudes that persist even today.

*As you did not attend the fundraiser in person; I feel you should know that the chess set in question is a piece of hand-crafted art and created by a Metis woman who is part of the MRWS. I have always been a proud supporter of the Mountain Rose Women's Shelter.*

- I didn't need to attend the fundraiser in person – enough community members reported to me how completely astounded they were by the presence of the item – only to be further infuriated that it was our elected officials bidding on it. I have no problem calling you on this – but it's sad that others will not.

*The fundraiser was in support of Women and Children in Our community which also has a mandate to end domestic violence and support our most vulnerable members of society. My intention was solely to support the MRWS. I believe all charities are suffering from lack of monetary donations right now in Alberta. Charity organizations in our community need our support in order to be able to provide services that have an ever-increasing demand. Is it your intention to punish those involved with this worthy cause? Is it your intention to draw negative attention to someone who donated time and money to this charity; thus discouraging others from supporting this cause? Is your intention to punish the Metis artist for her personal and creative spirit the donation to the auction was intended? Is it your intention to give the community at large the impression that I am not working towards positive relationships with the First Nations and Metis in our community?*

- Again – nothing here is relevant – you are deflecting away from the fact that you are okay with racist imagery and completely dismissive of the impact of your own behaviour. I always find it interesting that when calling out someone's bad behaviour – they defend themselves by blaming the whistleblower. It's strange, isn't it? I feel like you are suggesting that silence is the best approach to oppression and hate. Is that the case? Are you suggesting that those of us with privilege should not speak up when those who 'look like us' participate in covert and overt racism? Silence? Because an organization needs the money? Don't you think that if a community-based organization needs community support that they should be more responsible? Silence only serves the oppressor – and you have to spend more time learning and less time defending. Truly – you have an opportunity to learn here – but your opting to defend your

behaviour and accuse me of some kind of malice. It's my intent to never, ever let racism or bigotry go unchecked if it's ever within my capacity to do so. And when I'm sent photos of our elected officials publicly bidding on and purchasing something so OBVIOUSLY distasteful and offensive – I'm not going to sit in silent acceptance.

- I find it terribly unfortunate that someone who has been elected Mayor **views accountability as punishment**. However – if you feel strongly that nothing is wrong here; why would anyone be subjected to punishment? If there is nothing untoward – and I'm out of line, it's only me that stands to suffer, right? If you believe you acted with integrity and represented the rate payers – then no harm no foul. I'm just looking for some accountability. And I do feel for your position – I also participated in a charity event that centered around artwork and was challenged by rate-payers and council. I'm sure you remember. Accountability is key to this role.
- My intent is to stop this from happening again, and to challenge those privileged enough to be leaders – TO LEAD. You see, racism doesn't require intent – not at all – but **anti-racism** does. It's my intent to spend each moment using my privilege to build an anti-racist community.

*I have previously received a number of abusive and accusatory emails from you, and it is my feeling that you are Not actually concerned for our community. I have continuously worked to partner with First Nations before and during my time on council. I am proud to support the MRWS and will continue to do so in the future. If you would like an opportunity to discuss positive actions council and can implement, or ways to positively partner with First Nation people and Metis in our community, similar to what we have been working towards with Clearwater county I welcome your input as we always can strive to do better.*

- I have asked for clarity about which emails were abusive or accusatory (was it the one where I questioned your 'liking' of anti-trans posts on facebook?) That was another time that you didn't 'understand' the implications of your behavior.
- I think you should continue to support the shelter.
- As well, I have in the past asked for an update on the status of the anti-racism committee that was formed by previous councils and neighboring Nations. You didn't respond. You can now though, it's not too late.

The following is my formal complaint:

I, Michelle Narang, am filing an official complaint regarding the conduct of Mayor Baich in her participation in the auction and subsequent purchase of a chess board that depicts clearly racist imagery. The auction took place on February 26, 2023 at a charity event in Rocky Mountain

House. The public purchase of a chess board that celebrates colonialism, genocide, appropriation and ignorance has not bore 'close public scrutiny' and will not 'bear close public scrutiny.' In fact, the Executive Director of the Chess Institute of Canada has publicly condemned the chess board in a Twitter post stating, "Horrible – and on behalf of the chess community, a terrible look for chess." The Mayor has had opportunity to endeavour to understand how her actions are problematic, but she has only opted to defend and deflect as noted above. My comments are bulleted beneath her italicized words of response to my original complaint.

Leaders, especially elected leaders need to demonstrate anti-racism at every opportunity – it is essential to the health and wellbeing of our communities. The Mayor's suggestion that a complainant should stay silent in order to maintain the reputation and status of those who have perpetuated or even perpetrated hate in our community is appalling.

The piece itself was an affront to the spirit of Reconciliation, at best – but the bidding on and winning of this piece by the Mayor of Rocky Mountain House was completely inappropriate and a clear demonstration of her disregard for the impact that colonization and genocidal policies have had in Canada – and continue to have on those who live, work and play in our area. Purchasing this item was a display of privileged ignorance and arrogance that shouldn't be going unchecked.

I have spoken to members of Council in the neighboring Nations – I'm not willing to name names – so this can be left out if that's an issue, but they are also appalled although sadly not surprised. As well, I have spoken to a member of the MRWS Board who immediately identified the piece as blatantly racist. Again – I'm not naming anyone that has to be subjected to consequences that may come their way given the nature of leadership in Rocky Mountain House right now; but it's important for Council to have this information and decide if there is value.

It is my hope that Council will condemn this act of ignorance and racism & sanction Mayor Baich as fully as possible. There cannot be any real or perceived acceptance of this behaviour. Council makes a decision around that table as a whole; a decision of Council is a decision of Council and reflects as such.

Is there room for racism and bigotry at that table?

Redacted as per Section 17 of the FOIP act.