

Questions remain on South of 60

By Sarah Vance

The fate of the South of 60 Arts Centre/Railway Station and Visitor Centre in Barry's Bay is to remain status-quo, but there continues to be questions for Danielle Paul, the former culture and tourism co-ordinator.

Paul resigned at 4 p.m. on May 18, a few hours before a special meeting of council during which the fate of the centre was to be decided in a unanimous vote.

Paul resigned because of a human rights complaint she made. She felt council did not follow through with the findings of the report. Following a recorded vote, the centre will remain a year-round facility.

This came after a season of discord where Madawaska Valley council questioned the centre's budget.

Since November, 2015, members of the community have been bringing questions to council about expenditures in the arts, related to the centre. Over the winter, South of 60 made all of its financial statements available to council, at council's request.

Social networking pages and letter writing campaigns were initiated by residents who made pleas that council recognize the importance of the culture centre. It was estimated the centre generates \$1.85 for every operational dollar spent.

The tone of the process seemed to have deflated Paul's morale.

'A baseless public attack on one of my expense claims made by a relative of the subject of my complaint. This and other matters created a poisonous work environment for me,' said Paul.

She added, 'Given that the public apology I requested from the councillor immediately after his public attack would have resolved the issue there and then, it is my belief that the subsequent cost associated with two external investigations, potentially at the taxpayers' expense, not to mention the additional stress on me, has been totally unnecessary.'

Madawaska Valley council declined to comment on the human rights complaint or Paul's resignation.

Madawaska Valley council has been largely in favour of the visitor centre.

'Funding the centre represents pennies on the taxpayer dollar and it brings dynamic gains to the community,' said Madawaska Valley CAO Craig Kelley.

Kelley has helped front questions about spending associated with festivals including travel expenses, branding and phone-lines.

Paul suggested it isn't the scrutiny that was the problem.

'My resignation, contrary to some speculation, had nothing to do with the imminent decision concerning the future of the Railway Station,' said Paul. 'It relates solely to behaviour towards me, arising from a complaint of harassment I made against a councillor in February.'

For more information and background regarding the special public meeting visit www.bancroftthisweek.com/?p=6417.