

Darryl Wolk vs. Newmarket Era

Complaints about a bias, misleading reporting and conflict of interest in stories in the Newmarket Era have been dismissed by the National NewsMedia Council.

Darryl Wolk made a number of complaints related to coverage of the mayor's salary and a property tax increase. He alleged a headline was biased, and that the article described him in a way meant to cause personal discredit. He stated the article is misleading because the expert was not provided appropriate context. He also alleged libel in the quote by the mayor that the complainant was aware of the salary for mayor when running for office.

An article about a property tax increase prompted a complaint that the paper failed to disclose conflict of interest by failing to report advertising revenue from the municipality. He stated that a report of his department at a council meeting was a personal attack and confirmation of the paper's bias. The complaint also alleged the paper was biased in allowing the Mayor's column to appear during the election.

The paper denied factual error or bias in the article on mayors' salaries, and noted the sidebar article citing an interview with an expert provided broad context for a controversial issue. It pointed out the numbers cited are publically available and that comparisons are not exact. The paper stated that all sides had equal opportunity to address the issues.

The paper also stated that the Mayor's column reflects the office rather than the candidate, and that such a column is a common practice for community papers.

The NewsMedia Council dismissed the allegation of biased headline and misleading reporting, noting the headline in question accurately sums up the view of the expert quoted. The NewsMedia Council said the article includes comment from both sides as well as an expert voice, and cited information from other cities. The article noted there is variance in calculations related to total mayoral pay.

In dismissing the complaints of bias and conflict of interest related to the mayor's column and property tax story, the NewsMedia Council said there is no legal prohibition on publication of a mayor's column during an election, as it is considered to speak on behalf of the office, not the candidate. It noted that municipalities routinely purchase advertising in news media, and such practice is not regarded as conflict of interest.