



2020-63: Baskin vs Uxbridge Cosmos

September 30, 2020 – *for immediate release*

The NNC has reviewed and found that corrective action has been taken to address a complaint about accuracy and the opportunity to respond to harmful allegations in a September 10 news story, “Goodwood concerts spark ire and accusations,” published in the Uxbridge Cosmos.

The article described the apparent controversy surrounding a series of social gatherings in the area, including a wedding reception, and said that according to the owner of the event management company, organizers received threats from local officials and residents to shut down the reception.

The article included references to social media comments from the mayor in response to accusations of racism. It also included quoted statements from the company owner/event planner and township officials. Colleen Baskin, the complainant, was identified in the article as the township’s communications officer and was quoted as stating, “the Township vehemently denies that the investigation on this file was motivated by racial prejudice.”

Ms. Baskin filed a complaint with the NNC about how the article represented her, and the township’s, response to the events. In particular, she argued that statements from the event planner, which implied that she was present at the event and that she committed racially-motivated verbal and physical assault, were unfounded. She also stated that she was unable to directly refute the allegations made about her behaviour as she was unaware of the specific allegations prior to providing her response to the newspaper.

The complainant wrote a letter to the editor explaining that she was not present at the residence in question, nor did she engage in any threatening behaviour. The letter also stated that the quoted statement attributed to her in the original article was misleading because it implied she was physically present at the residence.

The Uxbridge Cosmos published Ms. Baskin’s letter in the September 17 edition of the newspaper.

In response to the complaint, the news media organization stated that the social media comments regarding the accusations against the township and the township’s response to those comments provided sufficient evidence that local officials were well aware of the accusations. It also noted that the official response from the township specifically addressed any accusations of racial prejudice.

The NNC is of the view that news media organizations have the prerogative to select and paraphrase statements as appropriate. Standard journalistic practice allows for reasonable opportunity to respond to harmful allegations.

In reviewing the complaint and article, the NNC noted that the statements in question were properly attributed to the owner of the events management company as allegations. The NNC is of the view that

the published quotes from township officials indicate that officials were aware of the allegations, and do not imply that local officials were present at the event.

With regard to the complainant's concerns about fair opportunity to respond to harmful statements, the article in question contained an official response strongly refuting the allegation of racial bias. It is journalism's job to present both sides in a contentious situation in order that a reasonable reader can be fairly informed.

In this case, the NNC is of the view that the article presented both the event owner's allegations and the response from the mayor and municipal office. It is not the job of journalism to settle a dispute. The news organization's decision to publish the complainant's letter to the editor represented an opportunity for the complainant to provide further comment and to clarify her perspective on the allegations.

In light of the above, the NNC finds corrective action has been taken and there are no grounds for further action on this complaint.