

2023-66 Kong v Goldstream Gazette + 2023-76 Kong v Times Colonist

January 29, 2024 -- for immediate release

The National NewsMedia Council (NNC) dismissed two complaints from the same complainant about the accuracy of similar articles published by different media organizations.

The first article was published in the July 13, 2023 of the Goldstream Gazette under the headline, "Federal bank clarifies it is not funding West Shore battery train pilot". The second article was published in the July 25, 2023 issue of the Victoria Times-Colonist under the headline, "West Shore light rail pilot project dogged by funding rejection, lack of viable test sites."

The complainant, Stephen Kong, filed similar complaints with the NNC expressing concerns about the articles' headlines and statements referring to the lack of funding from the Canada Infrastructure Bank for a 'test track' and train systems proposed by the Vancouver-based company ThinkEco Power Systems Inc. The complainant is the company's founder and chief executive officer.

The complainant argued that the articles were damaging to his company's reputation and that it had affected the company's ability to gain further support. In both submissions, the complainant said he felt the articles unfairly affected the decision-making process of the municipality vis-à-vis the project.

To support his arguments, the complainant provided the NNC with copies of correspondence sent by a representative of the Canada Infrastructure Bank (CIB). Those documents clearly stated that the CIB does not provide grants in pilot or development projects.

In response to the concerns raised, the Times-Colonist responded by noting that the statements in question accurately reflect the situation to date and are supported by statements provided by the complainant to the news organization. The NNC did not hear from representatives at the Goldstream Gazette.

In reviewing the accuracy concerns related to the statements about funding from the Canada Infrastructure Bank, the NNC noted that both stories accurately reflected the contents of the communications submitted for consideration.

The NNC understands the complainant did not agree with the presentation of the story and would have preferred to see alternate wording to describe the situation at hand. Both stories, however, contain direct quotes from the CIB representative and comments from the complainant in response to the situation. This adheres to the journalistic standard of providing parties with the opportunity to respond to allegations or criticism.

In considering the headlines of the articles, the NNC has long stated that headlines must accurately reflect the contents of an article but are only a single element of a story and are not intended to provide the nuance presented in an entire piece. Responsible news consumption encourages readers to read the full story for a more thorough account of issues or events and to ensure they have appropriate context to inform their opinions on matters of public interest.

For these reasons, the NNC found no evidence to support a complaint about a breach of the journalistic standard of accuracy, and therefore dismissed both complaints. Parties were notified of the outcome of the complaints in October and November 2023.