

Public Information, Not Identity Theft

Earlier this year, town officials accused the couple who started the informational website Northhaveninfo.org of enabling identity theft by putting up the first draft of the town budget, which includes names of town employees along with their salaries.

I did not comment on these accusations at the time they were made, because I knew that later in the year I would be attending the Council on Governmental Ethics Laws conference, where I could listen to and speak with experts in the field. The meeting was held last week, and I listened to and spoke with experts from the U.S., Canada, and Mexico. They were unanimous in saying that town officials' names and salaries are public information and do not enable identity theft.

The balance between privacy and making information available is an important one, and there is information that can enable identity theft, such as court records that include social security numbers along with names and addresses and financial information.

But in North Haven, privacy and identity theft have been used as excuses for the failure to provide more than the most minimal amounts of information. When I introduced myself to an official with the Connecticut Freedom of Information Commission, the first thing the official said is that North Haven has some serious freedom of information problems. It was embarrassing.

The false, vicious attacks on the couple behind Northhaveninfo.org led them to stop making any further information available to town residents. Our town website has little information about town government, no meeting minutes or agendas, nothing about the ethics process, nothing about the contract process, nothing about anything our town's leaders don't want us to know about. The attacks have made us all losers in terms of easy access to important town information.

I ask that all town officials who wrongfully attacked this couple make public apologies in the forums in which they made their attacks and in which their attacks appeared. I also ask that the Board of Selectmen call a public hearing to listen to what resources town residents want to see on the town website, and that they comply with these requests.

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