

I feel forced to respond to what I felt was a veiled attempt made by councilman Channing Stott and the mayor during the June 14, 2022 town council meeting to "shame" individuals for asking for public information, and for the "blame" of the attorney fees being incurred by the resulting GRAMA requests. Three GRAMA requests have been filed in the last four months to access the public's right to public information, and the public's right to know how the council is conducting our business. So let's take a closer look at where the shame and blame belongs.

To educate the public, and perhaps the town council, GRAMA (Government Records Access and Management Act) is a powerful tool available to the public to request access to eligible government records and documents of all types. I like it because it is open, public, and requires a response under Utah State Law (USC Title 63G). Refusal to comply could result in a class B misdemeanor (USC Title 63G-2-801-(3)(a),(c)). Government agencies and municipalities are also required by Utah law (Title 63G-2-108) to appoint and certify a qualified Records Officer trained to comply with records requests made by the public. It is not a question-and-answer board, it is not a tutorial, and it is not a deposition. Therefore in most cases, the municipal clerk is usually the person appointed to be the GRAMA officer because they usually have the most exposure to the records and documents. GRAMA is also about records management and storage.

Since January 3, 2022, when mayor Gary Bishop was sworn in as our mayor, he made some changes that I feel restrict or deny our legal and free access to public information. For example:

1. Public discourse during town council meetings has been limited to three minutes. This limit does not always allow enough time for a person to fully develop a thought or discuss an idea. It has been very selectively enforced, where some individuals have been allowed free-reign speech and no time limits, while I have been rudely shut down, even when I was officially on the agenda, and others were not. Two examples of this are Jim and Tammy Beckstrand in February when they spoke almost twelve minutes to talk about flags; Dan Rowley spoke for over four minutes (not even a citizen of Meadow) and was asking for money. There are more. I was interrupted rudely during my presentation during the April 19, 2022 town council meeting when I was officially on the agenda, and two other speakers the same night, were not on the agenda. Ron Payne spoke for over fifteen minutes unrestrained. This is discrimination and it is illegal.
2. Public hearings have been denied. During the March 22, 2022 town council meeting when the huge \$300,000 water purchase was announced to the public for the first time using **our money**, I said twice during the meeting that a public hearing was needed to address many questions the public may have before voting to proceed with the purchase. Mayor Bishop declined both requests, and denied further public comment in the water department concerning the issue.

Tony Cowley
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The council then proceeded to vote to advance with the process. I guess our opinion about how our money is used, and major issues, doesn't count.

Incorrect statements have been made by councilmen during public meetings that I felt were used to manipulate the public's perspective and perception of important issues.

Therefore, in conclusion, the town council seems amazed that GRAMA requests were filed to get public information.

In November 2021, mayor Madsen fired our appointed and certified GRAMA Records Officer, and failed to appoint and certify a new officer. Nine months have passed since the officer was fired (and this is plenty of time to appoint and certify a new officer), and mayor Bishop has still failed to appoint an officer. The officer, Lynette Bond, was not paid extra for this duty. She had just been re-certified in September, 2021, and is still listed on the state website as our official GRAMA Records Officer.

A certified Records Officer would easily have been able to handle the GRAMA requests without the help and cost of the attorney. Mayor Bishop chose to complicate my simple requests for public records by involving the town attorney, where the blame for the attorney fees originates, not by people filing rightful GRAMA requests.

Two of my GRAMA requests have advanced unnecessarily to the State level on appeal before the State Records Committee. This is the first time for Meadow-----ever!

So who is actually responsible for the attorney fees we (meaning us, the Meadow citizens) are paying? I feel it is due to the arrogance of the mayor and town council by not allowing people to fully express their concerns in public (therefore, GRAMA requests were filed) and the failure of mayor Gary Bishop to comply with the requirements of the GRAMA laws by appointing a GRAMA officer as required under Utah State law in Title 63G.

What happens when the people feel they have been denied the opportunity to be fully informed and to be allowed to participate in the public process? Rumors start to circulate, causing the contention and anger we are seeing in our town council meetings and in our community.

What I feel I am seeing is typical of the "cancel culture" or "fake news" we are seeing all over the country being used to silence people and squelch any dissent, where, if we don't like what you are saying, we will shut you up. Censorship has been the tool of tyrants and dictators worldwide, and throughout history. Let's not let it creep into our small town. The mayor and council work for us, not the other way around. Our mayor and town council need to be held accountable for all they say and do on our behalf. Did we elect a mayor, or did we elect a king?