

“Community voices” list - for Mary at WCEU

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Introduction

Mary Hubbard has agreed to a conversation where I (Patricia) would report community member grievances or concerns. I thank her very much for the willingness to listen to community voices. We will meet at WordCamp Europe for that conversation, either publicly with a group conversation or in a 1:1 meeting (to be defined).

I’m collecting feedback to be added to the points just below, or at the bottom of this document under “Personal opinions”. If you want to share your opinion, add as a comment on this document if you are ok to display your name, or send me a message on Slack or [LinkedIn](#), if you are willing to stay anonymous, which I guarantee.

I once asked Matt if he would be willing to hear about it/reply to questions and he replied he preferred to hear directly from people and not from someone on behalf of others.

I list here below **all the things I heard** at events, or in personal conversations, during contributions, as well as additions by people contributing to this document. We focus here on how people have been treated, not that much about the WPE legal case.

Specifically about user bans, we understand that some accounts have been restored, but trust takes years to build, and a few seconds to break.

I keep my sources secret and protected. Some were so worried about their agencies, hosting companies, etc. Fear of retaliation is real, hence self-censorship, but what you hear in private conversations is another story. I share some of those opinions, but not all, see my personal opinion at the end. Remember that for the rest, **I’m only the messenger here**.

About Five for the Future

Hours listed on .org for each team, or by person/sponsoring company is ridiculous. No one can believe what is true about that any given company is contributing that number of hours, no

mechanism to really know, and no way to see the invisible contributions such as organising events.

Problem with those contributing to a plugin or theme, it is not counted. I understand for commercial plugins where the free version is only there to lead to their paid version, but some people contributed open sourcing their work to promote WordPress everywhere.

Some at Automattic and other companies count their development time for plugins and themes as contribution hours, but others are denied that.

The whole system is seen as very unfair, especially if used to exert authority.

Comment from Anonymous: I would also add that some contributors to open source projects don't want to track their time when contributing and are therefore not at all interested in participating in a time-tracking "contest"...

Before September 2024

Heard comments:

- People against using WordPress org community social account to promote the San Francisco bridge lightnings, especially when contributors around the world were going through difficult times (January 2024, ongoing wars, major earthquake in Japan)
- People angry by the closure of the Marketing team and replacing with the Media Corps, led by an Automattician, without discussing it on Make sites
- I don't go to earlier "dramas" like the Thesis domain name, etc... too old, even if it didn't help with trust
- People wondering why there are links to ma.tt personal website and wordpress.com on .org footer

After September 2024

Heard comments:

- People were disappointed by the closure of the Sustainability team, and Matt saying he didn't know it existed, while he was the one on stage to reply to a contributor about the

creation of the team 2 years prior, and diminishing all the work accomplished by the team, and without discussing the closure on Make sites. Note: the following groups were supposed to be merged into the Sustainability team: Five for the Future, Contributor Mentorship program, DEIB working group.

- People getting banned from Slack just for asking a question about the checkbox. One example was “why do you delete comments?”, and the person got banned, after 15 years of non-sponsored contribution. Other examples include a mentor and a mentee, banned in the middle of the Contributor Mentorship Program, WordCamp/Meetup organisers, and [the person](#) representing the MariaDB Foundation to the WordPress community (and no apologies on the reinstatement email)
- People getting banned from Slack for adding a negative emoji (specifically a clown, or angry face)
- No IRT process for bans
- Matt advocating for Freedom of Speech and silencing people (by threat of retaliation, bans as an example)
- Advocating for forks, but banning those who talked about it, or talking about empowering the community with new approaches without even planning a fork (ie Vinny Green, Joost de Valk)
- Using derogatory vocabulary against community members (ie “your masturbatory project” to Sarah Savage, from AspirePress)
- Diminishing the importance of all contributors with comments such as “I’m sorry, who are you” and “how many followers do you have?”
- ACF take over, not as a fork, but stolen (yes, we know it has been restored, but by order of the court, and trust is broken for other plugin developers)
- Blaming WPE for self-induced damage, people blocked from updating their sites if hosted on WPE, then complains that people are angry about it
- Use the non-working Five for the Future (see above) hours count to exert authority
- Saying that Automattic was contributing 4000 hours/week when some were working on Automattic projects or contributing to plugins (when for others, contributing to plugins does not count)
- People calling Matt “little Elon”, or “Trump-like” for fear of retaliation, irony on freedom of speech, and counting followers (like crowd sizes), and maybe 50% of US citizens are ok with that, but it’s very badly viewed in Europe.
- Automatticians saying in private “I have to keep my job so I’m staying silent”
- People saying: I’ll stop organising/sponsoring/volunteering/attending/speaking at events for now

- People saying that Matt is thinking in a binary way, you are either agreeing with ALL of his actions or you are seen as “against him”, being called a hater and getting banned, there is no room for discussions, nuances and middle ground.
- People are disgusted by Matt having fun when other people (them not being post-economics) have their businesses at risk: like the “What drama should I create in 2025?” joke on Reddit, or the Pizza/Pineapple joke on the .org login form.
- People being afraid to communicate via Make Slack DMs, as they can now be read by admins.
- The legitimacy of the WordPress Foundation has been questioned on multiple fronts, as it appears to be run singularly by Matt with two completely silent partners. The “transfer” of the WP trademarks to the foundation then right back to Automattic was a particularly disingenuous shell game played with the community.

Overall

People feel they were misled to think they contributed to a community, and then realised they contributed to a personal project where one person decides everything and their fate, and that decisions supposedly taken by the community (in Slack or Make posts) are revised by Matt anyway.

People feel they have been held hostages.

On another topic, some say that staying on X for the official WP account is seen as not standing against the new authoritarian and potentially fascist regime (Musk role in the Trump administration).

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Above: what I heard, and I’m only reporting. Below: my personal opinion

Personal opinions

Patricia BT

[wordpress.org profile](#)

Matt had the vision and brought WordPress where it is, with the help of thousands of contributors in a mutually beneficial way, WordPress helping people build their sites and/or businesses, and contributors helping WordPress (dot org and ultimately .com and Automattic). I appreciate that and have gratitude for it. We, as a whole, benefit from it. But people see that contributing to a community means that decisions must also be community-led. As an example Matt says (in [Lenny's podcast](#)) that if decisions had been taken by a committee, the Gutenberg project would never have existed. I don't know, not sure, I personally think Gutenberg is one of the best things that happened to WordPress. I can understand he wants to keep control of all decisions, after all, he co-founded WordPress. But WordPress became so important on the web that it's important to ensure its future. It's a lot on his shoulders and trust would be completely back with committee-led decisions. It's also a lot of money to run .org, Matt said it's from his personal money, correct? and a proper Foundation would solve that as well. In my [October proposal](#), I even told about a committee with prorated voices based on contribution time, so Matt/A8C would have the majority of voices anyway (if hours are back higher than now, and a new mechanism for counting Five of the Future hours). Joost later made a similar [proposal](#), to work WITH Matt, not against him. Similar with the [WP Must Win proposal](#) or the [Call for Governance Reform](#) open letter published on TheRepository.email website.

I have agreed on some of Matt's actions, for example requiring companies to respect the trademark and if possible contributing back, but the rules have changed and a company being called "a cancer" and publicly exposed for not contributing back enough led to people thinking "is it now a requirement?" and thus not aligned with open source values. If they were sponsors, they think "what if my company is the next being publicly targeted?". I made a lot of friends in the community (contributors, agencies, sponsors, volunteers, independents/self-employed, etc), and seeing so many of them afraid for their businesses, clients, employees, or for simply contributing, is something I'll never forget.

I personally think that contributing back is important, I do it on my personal time, and have been doing it for more than 10 years. I'm now partially sponsored for some of my hours since last August, but I always thought that for non-sponsored time, I was free to choose to do it or not to do it. By the way, my sponsor is NOT related to this conversation and document at all.

In October, I was financially and personally impacted: I was going to have a meeting with a potential second sponsor for my contribution time and they cancelled, saying these exact words “because of the current situation. We need to see if we can invest in the community or not.”

I never understood the counterproductive action of banning people, most of them would have “sided” with Matt about the trademark if not ousted from our community, those really being 2 separate issues. Even I stayed silent on some of my thoughts, and initially hid that I was helping the [Alt Ctrl Org](#) organising team and first did it under a pseudonym. I was worried that there could be retaliation against me (or even against WCEU this year), or that I wouldn’t be able to continue being an official event organiser and mentor or take part in official programmes such as the Contributor Mentorship, things I love to do. I’ll always act for FOSS and freedom.

We put a lot of energy into finding and mentoring new contributors, whether it’s at WordCamp Contributor Days or during the Contributor Mentorship program, painstakingly adding a few long-term contributors, and within weeks in October, we’ve lost hundreds. To me, it felt like all the energy I had invested (freely, as my sponsored hours don’t cover everything I do) in the October cohort of the Mentorship program was going to waste.

As a WCEU organiser (2024 and 2025) or volunteer (2017 to 2023), a WordCamp mentor (since 2023), local WordCamp organiser (since 2016) and meetup organiser (since 2013), I see less attendees, less sponsor applications. This might be unrelated, but there is a slowdown compared to 2022-2024, when it was up from Covid-era. I’m talking about Switzerland, France, and maybe Spain and Italy. At least two WordCamp among those I regularly attended for years didn’t get organised because the teams were not motivated amidst the situation (said to me personally). On the contrary, I see more enthusiasm in Asia and Latam, so I’m not sure how differently the situation impacted worldwide.

I always had pleasant and friendly interactions with Matt when we met in person at WCEU several times, and I hope he’s reading and listening with an open-mind to community voices. I’ve always been honest about where I stand, and even told him by DM. It’s also important in my opinion that community members talk respectfully, even when disagreeing, some have really been unrespectful and I see why Matt is saying they are haters, but the majority of us are not. This whole conversation is not “against him” but for the love of WordPress and our community and for the common goals about its future.

Javier Casares

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In general, Patricia has already listed the most important points discussed recently, but I'd like to add a few—both personal contributions and ones I've passed on to the Hosting team, where I've served as Hosting Team Rep for the past few years (through 2025).

First, the WordPress.org site lacks a dedicated “Legal” section. Although WordPress was born in the United States, the project itself is global, and virtually every country requires basic information about site ownership, terms and conditions, and so on (including the US). In Spain, for example, any publicly accessible site must include a legal notice identifying the site owner; in Germany, the requirements go even further. Adding this would also prevent confusion around compliance with GDPR, CCPA, CPRA, which all share minimum common elements that affect WordPress.org since it has registered users (for example, policies on user deletion), or, if you don't want to automate it, make it clear in the terms and conditions how those requirements are handled.

Second, the [wordpress.org/hosting] page has always caused confusion (and every time a change is made, everybody goes to the Hosting Team Slack channel to ask about it) about who can be listed there and how. A few years ago, the “[Project Bedrock](#)” initiative aimed to solve this objectively, with stricter criteria than those Matt initially shared. After the project was ultimately shelved, it would simply be good to clarify (even on the page itself) what the requirements are to appear there and why, in practice, only companies more or less directly affiliated with Automattic have been listed.

Takis Bouyouris

<https://takis.nevma.gr/>

<https://www.facebook.com/takis.bouyouris>

<https://x.com/takisbig>

A message - We are not contrarians, we do not want to attack anyone, we just want to see this community function under the same rules it has set, which drew us to it and inspired us to dedicate such a big part of our life to the project. One needs to realise that the WordPress community is composed of a set of very very passionate people who identify with what they do. And many of them contribute voluntarily, with no sponsoring or support.

Anyone who is sane recognises Matt's mission and contribution to the open source and the community, which is immense. But can the leader own the project? Is there a point where they should separate their own business and the project itself? It seems that this line has not been clearly drawn or that it has been drawn in a way that benefits the business more than the project.

The rest of the open source world and the rest of the world is watching us, (us ie the WordPress community) and serious concerns have been raised as to the health of how we function. Some really bad precedents have been set and explanations like "this is not my first rodeo" or "things like this happen only once in ten years" don't seem to do away with the suspicion that has been created. Open source reliability is at stake!

Bans without due processes should not happen - Bans can happen and there should be a process for them. That process should be well documented, adhered to, it should be fair, with a possibility for appeal, and it should be as transparent as possible. Also it should be the process of a rotating committee, not a one-person thing.

The security team function is an issue - The way it acted when ACF was suddenly appropriated, non-transparently and, to the extent that it was explained, based on petty/small reasons (a minor security issue which the team could not fix because they were already banned - to everyone out there that seemed like they were framed).

Official Social Media accounts behaviour - Oftentimes the official social media accounts (mainly X WordPress dot org) reply aggressively and insultingly. Were it a person in an event that would raise a code of conduct violation. Yet our official community social media accounts seem to be above all this! This does not represent us!

Exploitation of community resources - Bitter remarks like the pineapple on pizza (which is disgusting, by the way) in the login page of everything that has to do with contributing show childishness and pettiness that does not represent our culture. Using the stage of a WordCamp, a community organised event to attack a company (even if it can be justified) is insulting to the organisers. I felt chills at the thought that this might just as well have happened a few months earlier in WCEU2024 in Torino after I myself handed the mic to Matt.

Sense of total control and lack of trust - Things like -apart from the bans- adding a WordPress dot org login even for a simple WordCamp ticket purchase raise questions as to the extent of the control that is centrally exerted. Also the idea of two people having to vet all WordCamp sponsors all over the world sounds ridiculous. There was a time when organisers were trusted to vet sponsors.

Five for the future - If it is there for show then fine. If it is meant for a reason then it does not serve that purpose at all. Counting contributions realistically by the hours is close to impossible. A badge system is better. Not too accurate, not too perfect, but immensely more fair and representative of the truth. Or a hybrid system. But then again, what would this “count” mean? Who attends an event and who does not? Who pays for a license and who does not? Who sponsors and who does not? Still sounds like either an attempt to total control or purposeless.

Lack of transparency in WordPress trademark usage - If a company pays for a license to use the trademark then the community should know and not be in the dark. Otherwise we create confusion as to how the trademark is used.

Trademark usage - A) Everyone is getting the idea that Automattic wants to control all aspects of the trademark filing for clauses that, to the open source culture, seem petty, like “WordPress hosting”. The open source community has fought against patents and trademarks for decades and now it is setting a whole different example. And what should we expect? Next thing the words “WordPress agency” and “WordPress developer” are trademarked? It all seems to not serve a greater purpose rather than just attack WP Engine.

Alienation between the community and its leadership - Now that is a really really sad and disheartening thing. If one considers the above and realises that there has never been a point during the last year (perhaps up to now) where the leadership tried to reach out to the community and explain what is happening and offer to cooperate with the community. Bad leadership leads to confusion and division. As I said earlier, WordPress contributors are passionate people, they should be allowed the freedom to have doubts and be skeptics, and they should not be judged in a manichaeistic manner of good vs evil, us vs them.

Schism - We should avoid a schism. United we stand. There still is room for reconciliation in the community.

Anonymous 1

The past years, we've experienced accelerated consolidations of power; for those in doubt, the events since September made it very clear that power is de facto extremely consolidated, both for decision making and for all things infrastructure. For a project as big as WordPress this is simply not a healthy situation, especially when the consolidation is entangled with both private and corporate interests with very blurred lines.

As most of us can not unsee what we have seen, I do think the only way forward for WordPress as an OSS project is to establish and safeguard neutral terrain for the future, and to revive 5ftF on these neutral grounds, allowing distribution of power and the project itself owning all infrastructure; you cannot demand to contribute even if there is only a hint of it being run by a single corporate entity. I do know I am not the only one with this point of view.

Jaap Wiering

<https://profiles.wordpress.org/jaapwiering>

WordPress has been good to me. I found the software I was looking for. I joined the warm and supportive community. The "Code of Conduct" helped me to understand respectful interaction. Working on accessibility, sustainability, and diversity has taught me ways to be beneficial to other people, future generations, and the environment.

My contributions to WordPress have yet not been dramatic or widely visible. Volunteering on WordCamps and co-organizing a Meetup works for me. I am – like so many community members – part of this broad base layer that welcomes and cherishes the most diverse and talented people I know. But being able to give back, rather than only receive, has truly enriched my life.

Many positive superlatives can be applied to WordPress, and I still feel proud to be a part of it. We can't be thankful enough to the paid and unpaid people and the leadership who created WordPress in twenty-odd years up to the de facto standard for open-source website platforms and CMSs. I love working on WordPress projects and hope it will last forever.

The developments were not only positive though, priorities could have been set differently, mistakes have been made, with an unsavory climax recently. It shows that the current one-man leadership and ownership harms the WordPress ecosystem. The current state of WordPress resembles autocracies around the world: a ruler surrounded by yes-men, arbitrary and opaque decisions, restricting free, respectful, and diverse speech, self-censorship and silenced dissidents, limited resources and stalled development, forcing specific behavior upon others, and loss of interest and trust. "Democratize publishing" has acquired a nasty connotation.

The power of WordPress lies in the diversity of the community. Together we can make things better, and an open and fair process to achieve that is not easy. Since last October, I have listened to and engaged with community members, sharing my own ideas. As an organizer I

have given room to dissident voices, because all these ideas add to a better future for WordPress.

For a sustainable future for WordPress I strongly believe in:

- reconcile with harmed community members (apology, explanation, restoration of trust)
- mutual respect by adhering to the Code of Conduct
- distributed leadership with clear decision-making and accountability
- resilient repos with a priority on security
- ownership of the brand in an independent foundation
- independent funding of essential infrastructure

I wish for a prosperous future for WordPress and its community.

Anonymous 2

I hosted with WPE because Matt and Automattic were invested in them, I thought I was helping, then my association with WPE became a problem for me overnight.

I had assumed the foundation owned the brand and IP and the foundation generated income from this to further the foundation.

I believed the foundation was independent of Automattic, and I had assumed the foundation would have had a representative from Automattic along with others.

I had assumed all types of contributions were valid, speaking, organising, building plugins, hosting companies, building themes, even commercial themes and plugins. And I believed in the network effect.

I think it must be hard to lead a company like Automattic or a foundation like the WordPress foundation, but didn't like the comms that came out from the .org accounts, I felt like there was little oversight.

The lines between the blogs on the foundation, .com and Matt's personal website felt very blurred, including the comms on social channels, I was not sure who was posting and commenting from where and why.

The way some teams were disbanded didn't feel right.

The way the ACF plugin was taken over didn't feel right.

The way people were blocked didn't feel right.

Using the word masturbatory in a tweet didn't feel right.

The positive feelings I had for Automattic and the foundation changed for me, I didn't want to be associated with the above while things remained as they were.

We all make mistakes so I understand, but to move on, you need to feel like someone regrets what happened, even if just their part in that.

Anonymous 3

It's not normal in a community that claims to be inclusive, in which we accept a charter of kindness at WordCamp, for people to be afraid of expressing their point of view, good or bad.

Matt shouldn't be on the foundation's board. And a board representing all components of the community (agency, extension and theme editors, community, hosts) should define the guidelines for WordPress development

Because trust hasn't yet been restored, I prefer to remain anonymous.

See you next week in Basel!

Sé Reed

I would like my Code of Conduct report to be acknowledged and addressed. I would also like the Code of Conduct to be applicable to all members of the community, regardless of their leadership status. The behavior I, and many others, have experienced is unprofessional, unsustainable, and unacceptable. Covering this up is only making it worse.

There is plenty more to improve, but until the accountability issue is solved, everything else is built on shifting sand.

Jeroen Rotty

I came for the software and to learn, I stayed for the people. I always considered the WordPress community people my 3rd family. I was in love with how open and inviting the community was/is to ALL. This should mean that, exceptions aside, nobody should be banned because of sharing their voice, their ideas or thoughts.

Last year, I really was debating if I would still attend (big) WordCamps or even organise meetups as I have been for years. I was no longer feeling welcome even though I was never kicked out. A lot of personal friends I made through the years were.

I hope we can all come together as one again, make public discussions about important aspects of our software, our decision making and the community. It's only natural that there are leaders in this big pool of people, but they should always be treated like anyone else in the community. In that sense, we should be equal.

I can only hope for the best, as I depend on this OSS for my own company, my blogs and my personal projects.

Cheers!
