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## Mississauga's invulnerable matriarch Hazel McCallion may finally be wounded

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And Mr. McCallion, 57, is quick to defend his 89-year-old mother, even as their intertwined reputations hurtle closer to public disgrace in a judicial inquiry that, layer by layer, is untangling the McCallions' troubling business history.

This past week, amid a hail of potentially damaging revelations, the first real signs emerged that Mississauga's seemingly unscathable matriarch may in fact be vulnerable.

"People have always given her a great amount of latitude because she is a very popular Mayor and she's done great things," said Duncan MacLellan, an expert in municipal politics at Ryerson University. "But I think in a case like this, there is a line that the public will draw.. She's probably going to come out of this quite tarnished."

Prof. MacLellan's comments come after a week of bizarre and startling admissions, many from the mouth of Ms. McCallion's own son, who lives moments from his mother's Mississauga home and visits her, by his count, five or six times a week, talking frequently about business but "not specifically telling her exactly what I'm doing."

After a cascade of documents - from emails and voicemail records to pages from the Mayor's agenda book - there is little doubt left that Ms. McCallion was deeply involved in backroom negotiations to push forward her son's bid to build condominiums and a four-star hotel in the city centre.

Peter McCallion says neither he nor his mother knew at the time he was a principal of World Class Developments; he believed himself to be a simple real estate agent, the inquiry heard, even after he signed papers giving him 80% of the company's shares - a transaction his mother signed as a witness. The Mayor's lawyer, Elizabeth McIntyre, has suggested Mr. McCallion "misled" his mother on the depth of his involvement.

"It will be up to the commissioner to determine whether or not the misleading was deliberate," Ms. McIntyre told the National Post. "At the end of the day I question whether it makes a difference."

Even if this theory bears out, questions of conflict remain prominent, experts say. For as a real estate agent, Mr. McCallion still stood to gain \$10-million in condo commissions, while his mother worked fervently to push the deal forward.

Ms. McCallion's legal team has said the Mayor did not violate the Municipal Conflict of Interest Act, which applies specifically to attempts to influence a council vote. Indeed, she declared her conflict in the matter openly in council. But **George Rust-D'Eye**, an expert in municipal law, points out the act can have broader implications; for instance, recommendations to council from city staff may be influenced by a council member pushing for a specific project.

"There are certainly legal requirements and legal prohibitions on a member quite outside the [council] meeting itself," Mr. Rust-D'Eye noted.

Ms. McIntyre says nothing from the past week's testimony suggests any untoward behaviour on the part of her client, noting the Mayor has acknowledged "from the outset" that she participated in private meetings on the World Class project.

"There is nothing in the Conflict of Interest Act or the common law that restricts the Mayor in attending these meetings," Ms. McIntyre said. "[Her] interventions in the transactions were motivated only by her interest in achieving a dynamic city core for Mississauga and not by any promotion of her son's interests."

Ms. McCallion, who has repeatedly declined interviews concerning the inquiry, did not respond to messages requesting comment.

The situation has Tom Urbaniak, a Cape Breton academic who has written extensively on Mississauga politics, questioning how all this could affect Ms. McCallion's relationship with voters, who have developed a powerful emotional attachment to their long-time leader.

"This has become the most serious political crisis she has faced in her 32 years as Mayor and in her 42 years as an elected official," Prof. Urbaniak said. The only other notable smear on Ms. McCallion's record, in fact, came in the early 1980s, when she was found guilty of violating conflict of interest provisions for taking part in a council discussion about releasing

3,800 acres of land for development - including a five-acre plot she and her husband owned in the East Credit area. But a judge refused to toss Ms. McCallion out of office, noting she did not gain financially in the matter.

Peter McCallion, on the other hand, as a shareholder of World Class, is entitled to part of a \$4-million settlement paid by land vendor OMERS to the development firm when the hotel deal fell through.

When he stepped out of Mississauga court this week, Mr. McCallion appeared unaware of the dust stirred up by his testimony. Dressed in head-to-toe black, including his trademark Stetson, Mr. McCallion smirked confidently as he told reporters he believed proceedings had gone "fairly well."

"It may not have been easy, but you have to do what you have to do," Mr. McCallion summarized. Asked about the possibility he misled his mother on his own involvement in World Class, Mr. McCallion denied the suggestion. Asked whether he thought his mother had done anything wrong during negotiations on the hotel deal, Mr. McCallion was unequivocal: "No, I do not."

Yet councillors and external observers have been quick to pounce on Mr. McCallion's credibility as a witness. He failed to answer strings of questions about details of private meetings involving himself, his mother and other World Class investors, and his claim that neither he nor his mother understood his role in the company has drawn stinging criticism - particularly as the Mayor is a savvy businesswoman with decades of experience dealing with developers.

"Hazel McCallion has a reputation for being attentive to detail and for questioning everything. It is very surprising that she would not have taken the trouble to figure out Peter's role in the WCD business, especially given her apparently great attention to the company's ventures," Prof. Urbaniak said.

Councillor Carolyn Parrish - one of the Mayor's most vocal critics and one who, as a future mayoral hopeful, has perhaps the most to gain from revelations tarring the McCallion legacy - says the inquiry has uncovered a genuine issue concerning the extent of influence and access to the Mayor's office by developers and business executives.

"[They] have much greater access to the Mayor - in her home, office and restaurants - than her councillors have had," Ms. Parrish said, noting Ms. McCallion "has championed accountability and transparency, as required under the Municipal Act, but appears to be doing quite the opposite."

Even the Mayor's closest council supporters, who have dismissed the \$5-million inquiry throughout as a spiteful attack on Ms. McCallion and a waste of taxpayer dollars, may have been forced to pause for breath.

Councillor Maja Prentice, who is retiring this year, still defends the Mayor, noting the hotel deal was something all councillors wanted; thus, she reasons,

Ms. McCallion had a duty to move the project forward. Yet Ms. Prentice remains anxious to hear what the Mayor has to say, reserving final judgment until such testimony comes.

"I'm certainly not saying that the Mayor has not done anything wrong or has done something wrong. I'm certainly not in that position to judge," Ms. Prentice said.

Councillor George Carlson begs to differ, suggesting the McCallion family has reached a new level of ignominy in light of all the inquiry commissioner has heard to date. The process, now on hiatus, resumes on Aug. 9.

"Breezing through City Hall, using his mother for clout and credibility, tapping into free advice from city staff.. [Peter McCallion] didn't just blur all the normal lines between public and private interests, he obliterated them," Mr. Carlson said.

"One shudders to think what the public reaction would be had this occurred in Toronto, instead of 'good old Mississauga.' "

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