

Mississauga News

Council backs off memo probe

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An investigation by the City of Mississauga's integrity commissioner has caused a sharp divide on City Council, with some councillors challenging his authority to question them.

George Rust-D'Eye received a request last week from Ward 9 Councillor Pat Saito asking whether the leaking of internal memos to the media - the communications offered to purchase each councillor and some senior staff a pair of \$350 tickets to Mayor Hazel McCallion's 90th birthday party - violated the City's code of conduct.

Councillors have subsequently been contacted by the commissioner, and asked directly: Did you release the information and do you know who did?

A motion from Ward 8 Councillor Katie Mahoney on the agenda at today's Council meeting, which called for City information technology staff to search councillors' computers to determine the source of the leak, was dropped by the longtime councillor. Mahoney, who doesn't believe it was appropriate for the City to provide free tickets, said her point had been made.

Ward 7 Councillor Nando Iannicca said it's up to the electorate to judge his actions and wondered what powers the integrity commissioner actually has to investigate.

"My very first question was by what authority does this individual have to, in effect, subpoena me as an elected official," said Iannicca. "Forget what the issue is. Does this individual have the right to say, 'Councillor Iannicca, we understand you may have had a meeting with a constituent this week, can you tell us who it was and what was on his mind?' The answer is no.

"The public elected us, they didn't elect ... some overseer who's going to make it his business to investigate individual members of Council on any issue," continued Iannicca.

While some councillors questioned what ability the commissioner will have to investigate, City solicitor Mary Ellen Bench said he's empowered through the Public Inquiries Act.

"His powers, if he chooses to use them, and it's in his discretion, are very similar to the powers the judge has sitting as commissioner of the (Mississauga) judicial inquiry," said Bench.

Ward 5 Councillor Eve Adams said she's hearing from people who are saying they don't want any more taxpayer dollars spent to find out who leaked

the memo.

She asked Saito to withdraw her question to the integrity commissioner. Saito said she'd speak again with **Rust-D'Eye**, clarifying she was only questioning if the leaked memos were a violation of the code of conduct and not asking for an investigation.

"I asked the question, he chose to go further and we can't intervene at this time," said Saito.

Councillors Jim Tovey and Ron Starr wondered why Council would hire an integrity commissioner and then balk at having him investigate.

"My very first comment is why (pay someone) and then not listen to their advice? I think we should just get out of the way and let the man do his work," said Tovey, who represents Ward 1.

Starr expressed frustration with the debate, asking if Council wanted an integrity commissioner or not.

"What I'm hearing is, 'let's question how he does his job and let's not spend the money,'" he said. "Do we want to be transparent or not? It's as simple as that."

The integrity commissioner has already prepared three reports for the City on issues he's been asked to look into.

Ward 11 Councillor George Carlson said that, in time, Council will become more clear on what issues are appropriate for Rust-D'Eye to investigate. He suggested that clearly determining what's political in-fighting and what's an actual issue will be necessary.

Adams, meanwhile, said the investigation is overkill. She added she never believed "an embarrassing expenditure would be made public and then the integrity commissioner would be used for a witch hunt on the whistle-blower."

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