

Mississauga News

Councillor gifts made public

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Page: 1
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Byline: Chris Clay, cclay@mississauga.net

A \$12,000 necklace and two airplane tickets to China – both 90th birthday gifts for Mayor Hazel McCallion – are among gifts City of Mississauga councillors have received since taking office last December for the new term.

Councillors have listed all manner of items, from gift baskets to floral arrangements, in their first-ever filing of Councillor Information Statements. The requirement for councillors to document gifts with the City's integrity commissioner **George Rust-D'Eye** is new, part of the Code of Conduct that took effect last year.

McCallion included just two items – a custom-made necklace/pendant from Lorne Park Jewellers and two tickets to China from Hainan Airlines valued at \$6,000. She donated the tickets to the Credit Valley Hospital Foundation to be auctioned off at a fundraiser.

Several attempts to contact McCallion for comment were unsuccessful.

Reached by phone, **Rust-D'Eye** confirmed he'd received all the required statements from members of Council and that everything appeared to be in order.

The code states that gifts worth more than \$500, or gifts given throughout the year by one source that add up to more than \$500, must be listed with the integrity commissioner. Still, some councillors went the cautious route and listed any gift they received, regardless of value.

Ward 6 Councillor Ron Starr reported receiving four gift baskets ranging in value from \$35 to \$100. He also listed a \$350 ticket to McCallion's 90th birthday celebration from Enersource.

Starr said he included the smaller items in order to be as transparent as possible.

A firestorm erupted in January when it was revealed the City had offered to purchase each councillor a pair of tickets to McCallion's 90th birthday celebration. The offer was eventually withdrawn, but not before Rust-D'Eye was called on to investigate who leaked internal memos about the tickets to the media.

Ward 11 Councillor George Carlson, who helped author the code, said having to publicly list what they receive will cause some councillors to think twice about accepting certain gifts.

"It makes people say no, which is the correct

response," said Carlson. "It has a dampening effect on what would pass as acceptable behaviour.

"I think anything that goes toward being accountable is a good thing," he added.

Ward 9 Councillor Pat Saito, whose only listed gift was a pair of tickets to the mayor's birthday, said Rust-D'Eye made it clear that "every small item" doesn't need to be documented. She said she occasionally receives small items of thanks, such as a coffee mug or other souvenirs, when she appears at an event.

"I have no problem with the information being made public," said Saito. "I have nothing to hide from my residents and have always conducted myself professionally and openly when it came to accepting any gift, no matter what it is."

The integrity commissioner reviews all councillor statements to determine if gifts might "create a conflict between a private interest and the public duty" of the councillor. If so, he can ask for the councillor to justify why they accepted the gift.

If he determines the gift was inappropriate, he can direct the councillor to return it or reimburse the donor for the value (if the gift has already been consumed or used).

Councillor statements are required to be filed every three months.

cclay@mississauga.net

- 30 -

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