

Council must pull together

Wed Jun 25, 2008

This year's grade: C-

Last year's grade: B+

Last year we cut council some slack because it was dealing with a new mayor and three new councillors. But we expected more this year.

And didn't get it. The blame for diminishing returns rests with Mayor Jim Abernethy.

In this past year, Mayor Abernethy has proven to be an ineffective member of council. How can anything get accomplished when so much time is dedicated to procedure? Council meetings have turned into marathon sessions. He has actually kicked delegations who disagree with him out of council chambers. The mayor has refused to allow them back in until they submit letters of apology. He needs to grow a thicker skin and realize not everyone is going to agree with him. Those who don't still deserve to be heard at council.

Mayor Abernethy's insistence on chairing the Green Committee, even though the rules clearly stated no sitting member of council was allowed to do so, indicate he has little respect for the procedures that govern council. That councillors did not stand up in unison to oppose the mayor on this issue spoke volumes about their collective ineffectiveness.

The single issue splitting council is the energy from waste facility proposal. Local councillors Gord Robinson, Willie Woo, Ron Hooper and Adrian Foster have listened to the concerns of their constituents and have opposed the project. Regional councillors Charlie Trim, Mary Novak and Mayor Abernethy have all lined up behind Regional Chairman Roger Anderson in touting the benefits of incineration.

Last year we said it was imperative Mayor Abernethy and regional councillors Trim and Novak find some common ground with their colleagues before the energy from waste debate scarred council for good. A year later, the damage has been done.

The mayor has stated he hasn't made his mind up on incineration. However, his actions indicate otherwise. Consider delegations he brought to council (such as a Swedish embassy staffer whose mandate includes promoting incineration) and his use of an industry-produced incinerator promotional video at an array of public events.

For his part Regional Chairman Roger Anderson has remained consistent in his approach to incineration. He's a big proponent of the technology and isn't afraid to say so.

This council needs to find a way to pull together to do what's in the best interests of the residents it represents. Mayor Abernethy and his fellow newcomers have had enough time to learn. It's time to produce.