

Ignoring protocol is folly

We really thought the days of throwing established protocol out the window to satisfy the wishes of the Mayor were gone for good. Apparently not.

Jim Abernethy's election campaign was all about change. And it was high time for change from the Mutton regime. For the most part, the change has been good, but no one is perfect.

Having Jim Abernethy sit as Chair of the Green Community Advisory Committee is a clear violation of protocol, but the Clerk is going to allow it. Just as it was against the rules for former Mayor John Mutton to use his municipal email address on his last election campaign material, yet that was allowed by the Clerk's Department.

Mayor Jim Abernethy has been behind the Green Committee since he was elected. According to the Mayor, this is a very important committee, and he felt it was the appropriate committee for him to chair. With power comes opportunity, and he took the opportunity to have his executive assistant call a number of Green Committee members before the first meeting, to lobby support of his nomination as Chair. That nomination at the inaugural meeting was made by Elva Reid, a member of the Mayor's election campaign team. In a phone conversation with The Times on Tuesday morning, the Mayor said that he was not aware at the inaugural meeting that there was a protocol for the establishment of the committee. The mandate of this Green Committee is to prepare a Green Community Strategy -- our local response to the interrelations among energy, health, climate change and development.

Ron Collis said in his presentation to councillors on Monday, that he warned against electing the Mayor to chair this community advisory committee. He said it would adversely effect the credibility and legitimacy of the committee amongst environmental advocates, and the community at large. According to Collis, who has participated in a number of community advisory committees in the past, the strength of a community committee is in maintaining the voice of the community. Having the Mayor chair this group changes the dynamics of the committee and erases the face of the community. One has to wonder why the Mayor thought he should be chairing this committee which, in his words, "is a very important committee". He did not come to his position as Mayor of Clarington because of his strong environmental leanings. In fact, he had no public profile prior to seeking election. He is not bringing strong leadership skills to the Green Committee, because he has not developed into a strong leader. Maybe it's of no consequence that the person who nominated the Mayor to chair the committee was a key member in his election campaign, but it gives the appearance that there is more to this Chairmanship than meets the eye.

In the discussion surrounding this issue at Monday's council meeting, the Mayor couldn't remember if the Green Committee had met five or six times since the inaugural meeting last September. But he indicated he had missed the last three meetings, and one meeting had been cancelled because not enough members were present.

Councillor Gord Robinson said at Monday's meeting that he felt it was appropriate that the Mayor chair the Green Committee because as Mayor, he can call executives of local

companies and be respected more than an individual would be. As a Committee member, the Mayor could still call the business leaders in town, and garner the respect due to the Mayor of the Municipality.

The Clerk Department's ruling that protocol can be broken in this instance, just doesn't wash. Because the Green Committee has shown support for the Mayor as their Chair, and council approved the nomination when they approved the minutes of that meeting, it is not an issue according to the Clerk's Department report.

The minutes of the September 19th meeting where the Mayor was acclaimed as Chair, were approved by Council on October 29. As the Mayor was not aware of the Committee protocol, there is no reason to believe any of the councillors would have been aware of the protocol either. Councillor Gord Robinson has chaired the Clarington Agricultural Advisory Committee at one time, and this too was contrary to protocol.

It was not until Linda Gasser brought the matter to the Green Committee at their November 27th meeting, that the conflict was brought to light.

The Mayor's role as Chair of the Green Committee has put a cloud over the committee. Now that he is aware that protocol has been broken he should step down. Ignoring established protocol so he can continue to chair this important committee smacks too much of the Mutton era. Mayor Abernethy ran his election on a platform of "change." Most of the change has been positive, but ignoring protocol is a step backward.