

Mayor's Green Chair up in the air

Mayor Jim Abernethy's role as Chair of the Green Community Advisory Committee is up in the air following Monday's General Purpose and Administration Committee meeting.

The Mayor's position as Chair of this Community Advisory Committee was first questioned by Linda Gasser who brought her concerns to the November 27th meeting of the Advisory Committee.

She informed members at that meeting, that the terms of reference for the committee state: "Members of Council and municipal staff sitting on the Committee shall not be eligible to assume the position of Chair or Vice-Chair." This committee was established as an Advisory Committee to Council, and as such, their purpose is to provide advise to council. According to Gasser it is not possible for a politician to address the council of which he or she is a member from the perspective of a citizen.

Rather than waste time on procedural matters at that time, the Committee decided to ask council to clarify their terms of reference.

Elva Reid, the committee member who nominated Abernethy as Chair, defended that nomination at Monday's meeting by saying, "Of all the people on the committee, the Mayor has the political profile and desire to ensure the environment is on top of the agenda in this committee. No other member has the same strength."

A report addressing this issue, from the Clerk's Department on Monday's General Purpose and Administration Committee meeting agenda, states that under Council's Protocol for Advisory Committees, the Mayor and Members of Council are ineligible for appointments as Chair or Vice-Chair of the Committee.

However the Clerk's Department recommend in this report that since neither the Green Community Advisory Committee, nor Council, has any concern with the Mayor sitting as Chair of the Committee, that his appointment be confirmed.

Green Committee member Ron Collis, in his address to the General Purpose and Committee meeting Monday, said this recommendation sets an uncomfortable precedent. "Clearly the report states that the protocol for selecting a chair of a community advisory committee has been violated, yet because neither council, nor the committee, has raised a concern with the appointment of Mayor Abernethy, this appointment should be confirmed."

Collis said that he voiced his concern about having a member of council as chair of this community advisory committee at the committee's inaugural meeting, however no other names were brought forward for consideration as chair, so the Mayor was acclaimed to the position.

This occurred for two reasons, according to Collis. First, as it was the inaugural meeting of a new committee, members did not have a clear idea of the level of work the position of chair would entail. Secondly, as he and other Committee members had received a call from the Mayor's Executive Assistant prior to the meeting requesting support for the Mayors nomination as Chair. Other members were intimidated into not running against the mayor, according to Collis.

The Mayor confirmed that his Executive Assistant did call some of the committee members prior to the first meeting to lobby support for his nomination as Chair.

Councillor Trim then asked the Mayor, "would you not believe no one stepped forward knowing you had contacted some people on the committee, that you would take the position, and they did not want to run an election against you?"

"That is a fair assumption," the Mayor replied.

When the issue was put to a vote on Monday, Councillors Trim and Foster voted against the the recommendation from the Clerk's Department to leave the Mayor in the Chair position, despite protocol. Councillors Novak and Robinson voted in favour of the recommendation. (Novak is also on the Green Committee as a council appointee.) As Councillors Ron Hooper and Willie Woo had left the meeting early to fly to Nova Scotia to attend a waste diversion symposium, it was left up the Mayor to break the tie. When the Mayor announced he was going to vote, Councillor Novak suggested the issue be tabled until the next council meeting where a vote by the two missing member could swing the vote.

Councillor Gord Robinson reminded his fellow members that a tie vote, at which time the deputy clerk stepped in and informed members that as the recommendation was lost, there was now nothing going forward on this issue. Councillor Novak put forward a motion to review the Green community Advisory Committee's selection of the Chair at the next council meeting. No one came forward to second this motion, so it was lost.

As the report was defeated, Robinson said his reading was that the Mayor had to step down as Chair of the Committee.

"If your looking for the selection to be approved, a positive motion would have to carry," Deputy Clerk Ann Greentree told councillors.

This was no help to Abernethy who said the Green Committee was looking to council for direction. "You should be making a decision on what kind of direction you should give to the committee," he stated.

After a five minute recess was granted to allow the Deputy Clerk clarification on how to proceed, a motion was made by Councilor Novak to refer the matter back to staff for a review of the terms of reference and protocol of the Green Advisory Committee. That motion carried.