

Residents say they won't pay for audits

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By Jennifer Stone

CLARINGTON -- Residents who requested an audit of former mayor John Mutton's campaign expenses say they won't pay the bill, and now, Clarington's clerk says the matter will be sent into collections.

Don and Cynthia Prout and George VanDyk requested the former mayor's election spending be audited, following the 2006 municipal vote. When the audit turned up only minor discrepancies, council voted to force the residents to pay for the audit.

The Municipal Elections Act says if the audit "indicates there was no apparent contravention and the council or local board finds that there were no reasonable grounds for the application, the council or local board is entitled to recover the auditor's costs from the applicant."

But after receiving the bills, the three say the audit was flawed in a number of ways. For example, the Prouts, in a letter to council, pointed to election contributions coming from duplicate addresses. Since companies are only allowed to contribute a maximum of \$750, contributions coming from duplicate addresses are suspect, they said. An ongoing audit in Vaughn, where a similar situation is being probed, proves this, said the letter.

Billing them is inappropriate, said the Prouts' letter.

"The amount is not owing, the audit was flawed, the errors are obvious, the town has been notified directly where those errors are, and your letter is nothing more than harassment," said the letter.

Not only that, but while the residents requested the audits, they only went ahead with council approval, said Mr. VanDyk.

"If you thought these audits were without basis or had malice (sic) intentions, or were of a frivolous nature, you could have voted against it and this matter would have immediately ended at that point and no further action would have been taken by us," said Mr. VanDyk's letter. "You must have been convinced that our request had merit to vote in favour of proceeding with it."

At about the same time as the Mutton audit was approved, council also approved going ahead with an audit of current mayor Jim Abernethy's finances. His audit also only uncovered minor discrepancies and council also voted to bill Ron Webb, who made the initial request. He, too, has challenged whether he should have to foot the bill, suggesting enough was turned up to have merited the audit.

As well, Mr. Webb said he was not advised of the possibility of having to pay, should the audit not turn up anything of substance. Mr. VanDyk made the same complaint.

"We learned about these costs in a newspaper article after council approved to have this audit done," said Mr. VanDyk. "This new information was never shared with us, nor were we given the option to proceed or not."

During Monday's Clarington council meeting, Clerk Patti Barrie said those who requested audits were told of the potential of having to pay for them.

"The bills will now be sent to collections," said Ms. Barrie in an e-mail.