

New procedural bylaw questioned

Wed May 14, 2008

By Jennifer Stone

CLARINGTON -- If they can't finish by their 11 p.m. deadline, Clarington council should have a previously agreed-on time to continue their meetings, a member of the public told councillors Monday.

But despite having to reconvene last week on an additional day for the second time since a new procedural bylaw -- which included the 11 p.m. deadline -- passed, the majority of council doesn't agree.

Last Monday, Clarington council began at its usual 7 p.m. meeting time. By 11 p.m., councillors still hadn't entered into the business portion of the agenda.

"Monday night, we didn't deal with any issues of governance," Councillor Adrian Foster said. "We didn't touch the agenda."

Instead, councillors heard from three presenters. Presentations included a lengthy, somewhat disjointed update from Durham MPP John O'Toole, after which councillors spent an hour asking questions.

As well, representatives of the Ministry of the Environment, on hand at the behest of Mayor Jim Abernethy, gave a presentation on the approvals process for landfill, which was also followed by an extensive question and answer session.

"No landfill is anticipated for Clarington," Coun. Foster said. "Why on earth are we worried about the Environmental Assessment for landfill? It has nothing to do with this group."

Darlington site vice-president Wayne Robbins rounded out the presentation sessions, which wrapped up at about 10:15 p.m. Council then took a 15-minute break, before hearing delegations who had signed up to speak. Council voted to go past the 11 p.m. curfew to allow all delegations to be heard but then voted to reconvene to complete the agenda Tuesday morning, against the wishes of two of the councillors -- Coun. Foster and Willie Woo -- who have full-time jobs outside of council.

For both, it was impossible to attend on a Tuesday morning.

"It's difficult, at 11 p.m., to get someone else to sub for me the following day," Coun. Woo, who works at Goodyear, said. "In my case, it's just not doable."

Louis Bertrand, a frequent presenter to council, told Clarington's General Purpose and Administration committee that it puts members of the public off to be left so late in the agenda.

"Only a small percentage (of Clarington residents) ever attend council and even fewer make delegations," Mr. Bertrand, a Bowmanville resident, said.

Council should publish a contingency schedule for meetings which don't end by the 11 p.m. curfew well in advance, Mr. Bertrand said. Delegations from the general public should also be moved closer to the beginning of the agenda, he said.

Reconsideration of the procedural bylaw, passed in time for Jan. 1, 2008, is necessary, Mr. Bertrand said.

But rather than do that, council should look at other time-saving measures, Councillor Charlie Trim said.

For example, councillors could cut back on the amount of time spent making announcements, something that tends to happen when the TV cameras are on, he said.

Both Mr. O'Toole and Mr. Robbins could have been accommodated during a day-time committee meeting, Coun. Trim said. That's the place for presentations from representatives of upper levels of government, he said.

"They come to have the exposure, on television night," Coun. Trim said. "I wonder why that would be."

Moving them to GPA makes sense, Coun. Trim said.

"If you take those out of the agenda, there was no need for the agenda being split into two meetings," he said.

Tuesday's reconvened meeting took just over an hour to complete.

A motion asking for a previously-decided schedule and limiting presentations to 10 minutes lost.

"It's our agenda, it's our responsibility for the seven of us to do our job and let the other levels of government, other businesses, come at our availability," Coun. Trim said.