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Veridian selection process broken

Appointments to the Veridian Board have become quite contentious for this current crop of Clarington councillors.

Two meetings later and appointments are still up in the air.

Last week, at the inaugural meeting of Clarington's new council, the name of former Clarington councillor Jim Schell, who has Veridian Board experience, was brought forward as Clarington's community appointment to the Board. Clarington has four positions on the Veridian Board, two go to councillors and two to members of the community. This term, Council will appoint one of the community members, and the Veridian Board will appoint the other. In the past, Council appointed all four members.

Appointments to the Veridian Board are viewed by some to be quite plumb appointments, in part because of the remuneration received. Members receive \$12,500 plus expenses for attending four meetings a year. If they attend additional meetings they receive further remuneration.

Jim Schell was Mayor Foster's pick for one of the community member seats on Clarington for a two-year term. Foster said he was putting Schell's name forward, even though he no longer lives in Clarington, because he has past Veridian Board experience.

At the beginning of the past term of office, Mayor Jim Abernethy's selection, Brian Mountford, a Newcastle resident who had a career in hydro, sat on the Veridian Board as a community member along with Howard Edmondson. Abernethy at one time said that Mountford was the only person on the Veridian Board who was worth his remuneration. Edmondson is a relative of former Mayor John Mutton, and a postal worker who assisted Mutton with his election campaigns while Clarington was running the mail-in-ballot elections.

Last April, after a few letters to council by members of the public questioning the high compensation packages handed out by the Veridian Board, Mayor Jim Abernethy moved a motion seeking to have Clarington Council members sitting on the Veridian Board hand their remuneration over to the Municipality. Councillor Mary Novak, who was just nicely settled into her two-year term as Clarington's Veridian representative, quickly jumped up to table Abernethy's motion until the next term of council, a move which was adopted. As a recipient of Veridian remuneration, Novak actually had no right to make any motions regarding her pay package. She should have declared a conflict of interest and excluded herself from any discussion and voting on the matter.

Novak's appointment was a further source of contention with the public when it was reported that besides her \$14,500 Veridian remuneration for 2009, she also racked up \$12,000 in expenses. Directors are allowed 50 percent of their total annual remuneration in expenses, and \$4,000 to take a module of the Directors College program.

The Municipality of Clarington, as a part-owner of Veridian Corporation, benefits from and depends on the annual dividends received from Veridian. While it is important that Veridian remain a successful corporation, the remuneration paid to its board members is not attracting the brightest and best to its Board of directors. It seems the Board is paying its members \$3,000 per meeting, simply because they can, while hydro rates for its customers continue to increase. Clarington taxpayers are also Veridian customers.

The entire Veridian Board appointment process is far too political, and the remuneration package makes it more so.

Councillor Joe Neal is on the right track by attempting to change the appointment process to one where applications are submitted, resumes ranked, and appointments are made based on qualifications. It is probably too late to change the Veridian Board appointment process for this term as the appointments are for a two-year term beginning in January 2011, but there is no reason the process can't be changed for the next term. The compensation package should also be revisited, and Clarington's elected representatives should be required to give back their pay, after allowing for some expenses, back to the municipality. Councillors elected to represent their constituents and their municipality should not be raking in additional benefits for sitting on one board, as part of their mandate as an elected representative.



Letters To The Editor

Democratic deficiency

To The Editor:

The events of the first session of the new Durham Region Council held on 2010/12/08 was a fine example of why there is such an increasing distrust for politicians...

Pre-election promises, made by supposedly "genuine" candidates, were conveniently set aside for self-centered expediencies, irrespective of what had been promised earlier to those who put their trust in these politicians.

Setting aside the question of past failings of candidates bidding for the Chair, the fact of the matter is that this was NOT an "either/or" situation, where one had to choose between the lesser of two evils.

Rather, there was a third one - who received NO backing but from those two principled Councillors who did put

forth this candidacy.

Could it be that, because of certain tactics used by some who only claim to do the will of Council, in fact Council had to "submit" to an agenda "or else"?

By its action, Council implied, once again, that it is still not willing to seize the opportunity for a new beginning and conduct its business in a way other than what has led to the current malaise. It unfortunately set the stage to continue the "Same Old, Same Old", except that, this time, the moral position of Oshawa is greatly worsened.

All of this leads to increased skepticism in the population and the gradual erosion of democracy.

By its action, Durham Council has contributed in no insignificant part to this agonizing prospect.

Paul-André Larose, Ph.D.,
Oshawa

To
The
Editor

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HAVE
SOMETHING
TO SAY?**

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