

# Caledon mayor to Halton Hills fire chief: We support our two-hatters in principle

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Halton Hills and Caledon are towns heading in different directions in the latest incarnation of the battle between two-hatter firefighters and their unions.

Two-hatting or double hatting refers to firefighters who work part-time in one community often their town of residence while employed full-time at another department. The practice is strictly forbidden under firefighting union rules, but many especially smaller communities employ two-hatting part-time firefighters as a cost-saving measure in place of full-timers.

The battle spilled over to social media last week (Jan. 27) when Caledon Mayor Allan Thompson called out Halton Hills fire Chief John deHooze on Twitter for the town's position on the matter.

With respect to Fire Chief deHooze, #Caledon supports #doublehatters in principle. We would if we only had one, read Thompson's tweet, which was accompanied by a graphic reading Volunteer firefighting is not a crime. Double hatters should be thanked, not charged.

It is important to note volunteer and two-hatter firefighters are one in the same. Volunteer firefighters are compensated for their part-time work.

Both Caledon and Halton Hills employ two-hatters in some capacity and currently find themselves at the centre of a debate that has raged for well over a decade.

Earlier in January, four two-hatter firefighters in Halton Hills faced an internal tribunal by their full-time union in Mississauga for having worked part-time in Halton Hills.

According to Fred LeBlanc, 13th District vice-president with the International Association of Firefighters (IAFF), two hatters charged by their union face fines, sanctions or even expulsion from the union, which in many cases can mean termination. LeBlanc added the vast majority of firefighters brought up on charges ultimately give up two-hatting to preserve their full-time employment.

While no update on the Jan. 16 tribunal's judgment has yet come to light, the Mississauga Firefighters Association's trial led at least one of the four Halton Hills two-hatters to resign from their part-time position in fear of losing their full-time employment in Mississauga.

A recent Caledon Enterprise

article reported seven Caledon two-hatters are now facing similar charges from their union in Brampton.

Thompson's tweet was in response to a Jan. 25 report from the IFP in which deHooze responded to criticism from a source within the Halton Hills Fire Department, who said they and others within the department felt the Town of Halton Hills was not stepping up in de-

said the source, who spoke under the condition of anonymity.

The source added the four Halton firefighters brought with them more than 100 years of experience and fellow firefighters were concerned about losing that knowledge on the job.

Experience is everything, they said.

In response, Chief deHooze said the situations in Halton Hills and Caledon were very

different and while Caledon is dependent on their two-hatters, Halton Hills has a master plan in place aiming to phase them out through attrition. The chief added the potential and likely loss of the four two-hatters wouldn't have a significant effect on the department's ability to

service the community at a very high level.

I'm trying to be very respectful of the four two-hatters who are directly being implicated. They are an asset to the organization, there is no question about that. But the notion that (losing) their hundred years of experience (will have) a significant or adverse effect is false, said deHooze.

The reason we're treating

our Halton Hills firefighters differently than Caledon is that Halton Hills within its complement of staff, 81 are currently part-time firefighters and 32 soon to be 34 full-time firefighters, we don't have the same urgency to defend our existing two-hatters. The impact for us is minimal.

Caledon has approximately 30 to 35 two-hatters, that if they don't support them, they will see a significant impact in the loss of their two-hatters, added deHooze.

The Caledon Enterprise also reported that Caledon council voted to support their two-hatters at a Nov. 29 meeting last year. Caledon has gone so far as to provide the town's Chief Administrative Officer, Mike Galloway, the authority to retain outside legal counsel and use the town's Operating Contingency Reserve for financial support to that end.

Chief deHooze said he had nothing to add to his original position when asked about Thompson's tweet.

I understand that there are people who are upset about having served in their (home community) for a significant number of years. I get it. I would be, but we aren't the bad guys. We aren't the bad guys because we aren't in the same position of needing support. That's the hard part, he said in The IFP's Jan. 25 article.



fence of its two-hatters in the same way Caledon has.

Caledon FD is going through a similar situation, however, the difference being is that the Town of Caledon has rallied behind their firefighters and is not only providing emotional support, but has committed to paying legal fees and fines for their two-hatters. The Town of Halton Hills has turned its back on ours and they have been hung out to dry,



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