

Fire committee overstepped its authority, says councillor

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Staff Writer

Recent decisions made by the fire services and emergency plan committee went beyond its purview, declared Wards 1&2 Regional Councillor Clark Somerville at a recent council meeting.

Somerville questioned council approval of the minutes of the fire services committee, effectively rubber-stamping decisions that the five-person committee made.

The decisions involved:

- appointing Deputy Chief John Martin as acting fire chief
- ordering staff to advertise internally, locally and nationally for the vacant fire chief position, and that the hiring selection be referred to the new council in December

• directing staff to work with the Halton Amateur Radio Club to investigate options for a replacement vehicle for the club

• purchasing equipment (up to \$84,000) to be used as a fire operations training facility

Somerville said decisions were made that other council members, not on the committee, did not have an opportunity to ask questions about and the first they've heard of them is by reading the minutes in that evening's council agenda. "There is a flaw in the process, the way this was done," said Somerville, who was backed by fellow regional councillor Jane Fogal. "When you see budget items for \$84,000, disposition of assets and appointments, that's the purview of council to do that."

In particular, the councillor was concerned about discussion that centred around contributing a town trailer to the Halton Amateur Radio Club (HARC) for its mobile communications vehicle.

HARC had sent a letter to the fire department in September noting that its current vehicle is ageing and requesting that the Town not only supply a surplus replacement vehicle but the Town continue with its upkeep.

In a report sent to the committee

only, the fire department stated it did not have any vehicles suitable for the club's needs. But given HARC's role in the Town's Emergency Plan and service at community events such as the fair could be jeopardized without a mobile command centre, the fire department recommended to the committee that they work with the club to find a solution to its problem.

"If there is recommendation coming forward, my assumption it would come to council (for approval)," defended Councillor Moya Johnson, chair of the fire services committee. "There is no financial obligation at this point."

Johnson also pointed out that committee only agreed to go ahead to advertise for a new chief—the hiring decision remains with council.

The fire department has been given the go-ahead to purchase inter-modal shipping containers and have them custom-modified for use as a fire operations training for about \$84,000. Council, she said, had already included \$110,000 in the 2006 budget for a fire training facility.

Somerville, unappeased, said the decisions still should have been made by full council and were not in the purview of the committee, adding if committees are going to take on a different role then that's a discussion should be held in council— first.

Chief Administrative Officer Dennis Perlin agreed in the future to circulate the committee's agenda and reports to all council members before it meets, and to circulate its minutes to all members before it comes to a council meeting for ratification.

"It's a wise approach, if one is going to use a committee as means of dealing with items of business," said Perlin. "But just to be sure there's no misunderstanding, the matter is here (at council) for adoption, not just for receipt and nothing would have happened unless council adopted those items."

(Cynthia Gamble can be reached at cgamble@independentfreepress.com)



CLARK SOMERVILLE



Enjoying a merry Montgomery Christmas

The 14th annual Montgomery Christmas was held this past Saturday in Norval at various locations with fans of the famed *Anne of Green Gables* author able to check out various sales and displays. (Top) Sherry Young adjusts her display at Nashville North. (Right) Joan Scannell (left) and Daphne Rolfe look at items for sale at the Christmas bazaar held at Norval Presbyterian Church. (Below) Deb Quaille, author of *L.M. Montgomery: The Norval Years, 1926-1935*, had her book launch and signing at Nashville North.

Photos by Sabrina Byrnes



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