

# CH Foundation wants to move on: chair

By IRENE GENTLE  
The Champion

First the volunteers were fired, followed by a flurry of fired off missives.

But now the Conservation Halton Foundation (CHF), which is the fundraising arm of Conservation Halton (CH), is calling for a cease-fire instead.

"It's been a difficult year. We've probably created a lot of hard feelings, said CHF chair Dennis Gregor. "I hope we can just move on."

Both CH and the CHF have been in the eye of the storm since a controversial March 30 decision to dismiss the entire volunteer fundraising board.

At the time, CH said the board was dysfunctional, incapable of raising the kind of dollars needed through aggressive corporate campaigns.

So the walking papers were delivered, and the canned members invited to reapply to the new board if they wished.

Five did. With the exception of town Councillor Cindy Lunau, they were accepted back into the fold.

But the initial dismissals triggered a furious wave of reaction, including heated letter and e-mail exchanges between some members of the new and old foundation.

Much of the controversy has simmered around Ms Lunau, who said she's only interested in the truth.

"An honest and open approach is always the best," she said. "It's the principle with which I've led my life."

But her efforts to bring out the truth is viewed by some as a light-on-evidence whisper campaign aimed at stirring up doubts about the ethics of the normally-esteemed organization.

Largely in question is a federal Eco-Action grant, which was applied for before the early spring purge.

The money has been since approved and is slated to fund a Bronte Creek watershed study.

But Ms Lunau and others contend the application took an unusual back-door

route, reaching the feds without pausing at the foundation.

As far as she has been able to determine, "there's not a motion on the books approving the application even now," said Ms Lunau.

Though the foundation is eligible for the grant, CH isn't.

So Ms Lunau is worried that the foundation would have to take a hands-on role in the project to fulfill the grant requirements.

That was denied by Mr. Gregor, who also serves as the vice-chair of CH.

Jim Snow, a former CHF member who chose not to reapply after his dismissal, also can't recall the application coming to the board.

"I could have missed a meeting, but I seldom miss a meeting," he said.

But Mr. Gregor said the grant wasn't approved under false pretenses.

"Up front, Eco-Action knew that the

money was in essence being funneled through the foundation," he said. "I have no worries at all on that."

If that's the case, Ms Lunau wonders why her requests to see the Eco-Action documents even in the presence of CHF or CH members have been denied.

She has also suggested that the CHF undergo a forensic audit to prove it's completely clean.

"If there's nothing wrong, why not do it," she said, pointing out that she isn't the first or only person calling for an audit. "There's enough speculation and concern. Why not address it?"

But annual checks by the accounting firm KPMG haven't uncovered a whiff of wrongdoing, said Mr. Gregor.

"We have to have evidence put forward that money has been taken from the foundation and used inappropriately," said Mr. Gregor. "I still haven't seen a problem, and

no one has pointed it out to me."

And though a review of procedure is likely in order, a financial audit isn't, said Mr. Snow.

"A forensic audit, in my opinion, is called upon when there's concern about wrong-doing," he said. "I'm not aware of any wrong-doing. I'm not aware of suspicion of wrong-doing or missing funds."

Now it's time for the new board to get on with the business of raising money, said Mr. Gregor.

"The only thing that would revert our attention back to the old board is if there is hard evidence being presented," said Mr. Gregor. "We haven't seen that come forward, and we don't expect it."

An opportunity arose July 19 when the new CHF invited Ms Lunau to present proof of her concerns. But on the advice of her solicitor, Ms Lunau declined to appear.

Due to early holiday production deadlines, the Tuesday edition will go to press tonight.



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