

Council didn't breach hiring policy: Jonathan

District 3 Councillor points to policy in support of Health contract extension

By Paul Baswick

District 3 Councillor Roger Jonathan has pulled out the policy book in support of a recent council decision which has drawn sharp criticism from two two of his colleagues.

At a Dec. 18 meeting, band council was presented two similar requests by Health portfolio holder Barb Harris, asking that two six-month contracts belonging to Cynthia Barton, acting counselor at New Directions Addiction Services, and Marnee Moore, acting nutritionist at Health Promotion and Nutritional Services, be extended.

That the requests were brought before council at all, however, drew protests from District 1 Councillor Dave Hill and District 4 Councillor Glenda Porter. They claimed the band's hiring policy did not give council the authority to extend the contracts, and that the positions must instead be posted.

Although council voted to extend Barton's contract, the second request was denied amid continued warnings from Hill that council would be breaking its own policy by granting the extension.

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Council's response to the requests prompted Hill, both at the meeting and in a story featured in the Dec. 26 issue of the *Teka*, to criticize council for "picking and choosing" when it applies policy.

But Jonathan, as he did when the requests were presented last month, maintains council had every right to vote on the contract extensions as outlined in the band's hiring policy.

"I said it twice. I said 'We're not overriding policy, council. We have the authority to do this.' I knew that we did."

"People will take [Hill's comments] as gospel, saying 'there goes that new council breaking policy.' I just want to clarify it, that we do have that ability to [grant extensions], and the jobs were not open, so they shouldn't have been posted."

Jonathan cites a section in the hiring policy dealing with term employment within a program.

"The authority to offer term employment of 6 months or less," the policy reads in part, "shall be with the Director of Operations. Employees may be selected from an eligibility list formed by Personnel and Grand River Employment and Training (GREAT). The Director of Operations shall not authorize a successive term employ-



Roger Jonathan

ment after completion of the first 6 months unless authorized by Council.

"Employment of a person for a term of over 6 months must be approved by Council, and reasons must be given by the Directors of Operations, as to why the appointment should occur instead of proceeding under the selection process."

Jonathan says that although the wording of the section is outdated, (the position of Director of Operations was phased out over a year ago), the policy clearly allows council to vote on extension requests such as

those brought to the table on Dec. 18.

He adds that not only is Hill's criticism of council regarding the requests unwarranted, but that the comments imply Health director Ruby Jacobs, who sent the requests to council, was either unfamiliar with the hiring policy or that she knowingly asked council to break it.

"The director of Health Services, Ruby Jacobs, who is a very qualified worker and would never ever try to override policy, sent it to us knowing that she did all her work on it, that we need these two positions — period," says Jonathan.

"It shouldn't have to get beat up in an open forum like that. We've got more important million-dollar items that we have to address."

He says he was disappointed Hill and Porter, both veteran councillors, weren't more familiar with the hiring policy.

"I think it was a lack of understanding of policy. If it was a new councillor arguing the point, it would have been easier to live with, but it was me, who has been there nine months, and two other councillors who have been there two terms at least. It should have been us three, Dave, Glenda and myself, that should have been able to clarify it for the new ones."

He says matters weren't helped by the fact that council didn't have the actual hiring policy on-hand at the meeting. Although council has immediate access to policy when it meets at the Band Administration Building, that wasn't the case when it met on Dec. 26 at I.L. Thomas Elementary School.

Jonathan says taking the documentation on the road will help council avoid confusion over policy at future meetings.

"What I asked the chief to do is for now on, if we ever go away from the council chambers to have meeting, we'll take the folder with us with the council policies in there. If we need clarification, someone can just take five minutes and look through it. The chief's going to make a recommendation that we do carry it with us when we go around to the schools and that to have meetings."

He adds that having the policy on-hand on Dec. 18 could have saved council time and frustration, and more importantly, could have retained an experienced health care professional in a much-needed position.

"If I could have flipped it open that night, we probably would have got both extensions through."