

Weekender Edition

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Bantheau
JEWELLERS
Across from
Clock Tower
STOUFFVILLE



Daniel Jedyneck's class recycles/ pg. 29

Bob Hodgson fired without guilty verdict

TRACY KIBBLE
Staff Reporter

York Regional Council fired Engineering Commissioner Bob Hodgson Thursday without finding him guilty of any offence.

York officials voted 15-3 in favor of firing the 20-year senior employee, but admitted in a resolution the move came "without a finding that (Hodgson) acted improperly in any way."

However, council said it was in the "best interest" of the regional corporation that Hodgson's employment be terminated effective April 25.

The hearing was to determine whether Hodgson intentionally misled officials over a land deal in Richmond Hill. Hodgson, who privately negotiated the sale of land for \$783,000 with developer Alfredo DeGasperi, saved the taxpayers about \$700,000, said his lawyer, Ronald Bohm.

The region was prepared to expropriate the lands needed for a CN railway overpass, which would have cost \$1.3 million, Bohm added.

Bohm said the region assumed the word "dedicate" (the land) meant to give for free, but added that is not always the case. The word "dedicate" means to set lands aside for the use of a road, Bohm said.

Bohm pointed to a letter on file from DeGasperi's company, Metrus, which stated it "was never the intention" to give the land for free.

The hearing also focused on a handwritten memo that Hodgson's deputy commissioner, John Ireland, wrote to Hodgson apparently one day before an engineering committee meeting Oct. 1.

Ireland swore an affidavit he gave the hand-written memo to Hodgson

and left it with him after Hodgson said he would take care of it.

"I wasn't sure in my own mind if (Hodgson) was completely clear on the wording," of the contract, Ireland said.

But Hodgson denied receiving the memo and said he found it in his files only after Regional Chairman Eldred King asked to see the file.

Council members grilled Ireland and other members of the engineering department for more than one hour to determine the whereabouts of the memo, who had it in which file and who had access to the file.

Officials voted at the end of a six-hour hearing after returning from private session to obtain legal advice.

Whitchurch-Stouffville Mayor Fran Sainsbury, who along with Newmarket Mayor Ray Twinney and East Gwillimbury Mayor Bob Featherstonhaugh, voted against firing Hodgson.

Sainsbury said Hodgson was being used to cover up a flawed process within the regional administration and said council should be looking at improving the internal structure rather than blaming people for its weaknesses.

But Markham Regional Councillor Ron Moran, who seconded the motion to fire Hodgson, said different accounts of events leading to the disappearance of an internal memo means "someone is lying."

Bohm said he's not sure whether his client will appeal the decision.

In the meantime, Ireland will be named acting commissioner for the engineering department.

Hodgson said he will "take it one day at a time," now that his 20-year career with York Region is finished.

See page 3 for more on the hearing.



PHOTO: JORDAN WHITEVEY

Music, music, music

Music Mania, the 31st annual edition, continues its run at Stouffville District Secondary School this weekend. On opening night

Thursday, the crowd was treated to a wide array of acts, all using the theme of Hollywood. Here, a line of dancers perform.

Bylaw stamps out public smoking

Smoking cigarettes in public places will soon be against the law in Whitchurch-Stouffville.

And representatives from local community boards and some store owners claim business will be lost, and charged the town is not equipped to enforce the issue.

Local officials passed the controversial non-smoking bylaw (91-73) Tuesday night on a 5-2 vote in favor of regulating smoking in public areas.

Ward 1 Councillor Margot Marshall and Ward 3 Councillor Nick Tatone, the only two smokers on council, voted against passing the bylaw. Tatone threatened to light up a cigarette in council chambers to prove the law can't be enforced.

Stouffville Downtown members also told officials they could not give "full approval of the bylaw as it is written" claiming the restriction is an "invasion of private property."

However, the Chamber of Commerce executive said it would support the law in principle.

Former Ward 2 Councillor Ron Robb, representing the Balantrac Community Centre Board, told officials they had "better be prepared to enforce" such a law.

He added local taxes are still on the rise (up 4.9 per cent from 1990) and requested "all the dollar figures be brought forward before the bylaw is passed so people realize how much this will cost." Robb urged officials.

Robb accused council of "shoving this down people's throats" and said the bylaw is not educational, but dictates to smokers.

"You're punishing smokers rather than trying to help them," Robb claimed.

Meanwhile, Ward 3 resident Dave Probert, who is a member of the Lemonville Community Centre executive, said he resents the way the issue has been "pushed through council - far too quick."

Probert said passing the law would affect bookings at local

halls and would cost the board about \$2,500 a year in lost revenue. He added council would be "taking away (smokers) rights."

But Mayor Fran Sainsbury said the town should consider health issues before revenue.

"Are we going to put monetary gain before health? Because we'll have to pay (for sick smokers) in the long run through the health care system," Mayor Sainsbury said.

And resident Lorna Turner, who originally urged officials last month to pass the law asked about the rights of non-smokers.

"It seems whenever there is a debate about rights, the rights of the smoker always come before the rights of the non-smoker. I have the right to breathe clean air and my two children have that right," Turner said.

Turner added most people will comply with a no-smoking law and said "you can argue until you're blue in the face" - a bylaw is the only way to get people to butt out in public areas.

She said the change room floors at the Recreation Complex are ruined because of cigarette burns - despite "no smoking" signs posted. However, Stouffville Deli owner Jack Vemboog said he'll "lose business left and right" if he is forced to tell people to "kill their cigarettes."

The bylaw, which will not apply to functions booked this year, would leave the owners of stores and people who book halls responsible that there is no smoking except for in designated areas, said Town Chief Administrative Officer Bob Panizza.

"There will be times when people won't co-operate, but it's like that with any rule or regulation. People speed when they're not supposed to also," Panizza said.

"Ninety per cent of people will adhere to the bylaw. It's not been a problem in any other municipality and Whitchurch-Stouffville is the last of (York Region) municipalities to have this bylaw," he added.

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