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Bowes' severance package doesn't reflect status quo

Imagine retiring voluntarily and, in addition to your pension, collecting \$204,355 in severance pay. Not likely? You don't get severance pay if you choose to leave?

Clearly, your name is not Bill Bell or Don Cousens.

The two long-serving mayors will leave office with severance packages from both their municipality and York Region. Mr. Bell gets \$145,854 for his 26 years of service in Richmond Hill and \$58,501 for his 18 years on regional council. Mr. Cousens gets \$103,273 from Markham and \$43,458 from the region.

Since both men are over 65, they can also start collecting retirement benefits from the Ontario municipal employees retirement system.

And while we're looking at lifetimes of public service, what about a politician who dedicated 29 years to representing his community?

Harry Bowes was Whitchurch-Stouffville's public school trustee for 23 years, chairperson of the board for several of them and a councillor for six.

After reluctantly deciding not to run, his severance is valued at \$9,700.

Had he done his public service a few miles south in Markham, he'd have received about \$29,000. Had he done it a few miles to the west in Aurora, he would have received nothing.

And if he was in my job — and probably yours — he'd have received nothing, too.

It doesn't make much sense, does it?

But the other mayor who is stepping down missed the gravy train. Tom Taylor, who has served Newmarket for 42 years, receives only his regional council severance of \$43,458.

He tried to change the policy back in August, but his local council voted against him. Aurora and East Gwillimbury also refuse to grant severance pay to politicians.

I can understand why mayors in the large, urban municipalities to the south make considerably more than their northern counterparts, but it hardly seems fair that politicians in the south collect handsome severance pay from their taxpayers while the ones in the north don't.

Payment of severance is a principle and, since it's based on the individual's salary, it affects each town



David Teetzel

the same.

But, if you ask me, every municipality in York Region has it wrong.

I think they should all provide severance pay to politicians on the same basis that private companies provide severance to employees.

I don't begrudge Michael Di Biase any of the \$108,180 he is likely to receive from Vaughan taxpayers if he leaves office because he is leaving involuntarily (now there's an understatement!).

And I think it's unfair defeated Aurora Mayor Tim Jones won't get a red cent from local taxpayers there.

Companies offer severance packages to employees who are laid off or fired and it's perfectly fair to give a defeated politician money to help in the transition to new employment, provided the politician wanted to continue working.

But a politician who chooses to leave office should not receive this perk.

This generosity with public funds went to the farthest extreme when Vaughan ended up in a legal fight with the family of former mayor Lorna Jackson over whether or not severance should be paid after she died in office.

Now, one can argue these long-serving politicians have poured their lives into their community and deserve something.

But in the real world, severance pay is not a reward for a job well done. Often, it's quite the opposite.

And in terms of community honours, Mr. Cousens certainly received his share. The other week, he received a set of office furniture and a lifetime golf pass from appreciative local business people.

And everything from the Markham bypass and a wing of Markham Stouffville Hospital to a meeting room at the Markham Board of Trade will be named in his honour.

All of these are absolutely appropriate. But I question taxpayers being required to chip in.

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