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Recording living documents

Dear editor:

In response to the latest appearance of Norm Jack on Bayshore Radio (SPIRG Debt an Issue for Southgate Monday, December 21, 2015 11:33 AM?by Matt Villeneuve)
http://www.bayshorebroadcasting.ca/news_item.php?NewsID=80502 and as a former director of Southgate Public Interest Research Group (SPIRG), I must make a few comments.

Once again, Deputy Mayor Norm Jack neglects to present the whole truth. Sadly, in his continued criticism against SPIRG, Mr. Jack neglected to mention that the offer of money against the outstanding monies owed by SPIRG was not the only offer made to Council. A second offer was also presented to Council that same evening. That is, SPIRG offered to provide the constituents and ratepayers of Southgate an opportunity to view Council sessions by scheduling SPIRG members to videotape and publish the unedited version of council meetings for the public. This offer would have relieved Southgate of the expense of setting up their own system at this time and/or paying a third party for these same videotaping services. Equipment and expertise was to be supplied by SPIRG at no additional cost to Council. This offer was rejected. The reason? The procedural bylaw does not allow recording of meetings. But as we all know, the bylaw is a ?living' document and can be amended at any time.

Further, given the campaign promises of all the candidates in favour of recording, this seemed like a method of providing services to Southgate in lieu of monetary repayment. Something which SPIRG could do quite effectively, and had the in-house expertise to make it happen.

However, the actions of Council since that time appear to indicate that there is no intention to follow through on the campaign promises of increased transparency and accountability to the public, aided by videotaping. Cost is always quoted as a factor although with the SPIRG offer, it would have cost Council nothing. Therefore it is evident that the service offered by SPIRG has a high monetary value!

Instead of taking either of these offers as a willingness to negotiate some form of settlement in good faith, there was silence from Southgate. It is almost as if the Deputy Mayor does not want the debt paid off for fear he would have nothing to say at Council meetings.

Still, the ratepayers of Southgate need to know that SPIRG recognizes its financial obligation. To this end, SPIRG has made offers to Southgate which have been rejected. Southgate council has not offered to enter into any direct negotiation towards an agreement. It seems that the responsibility for this impasse rests equally on Southgate.

Just as important here, Mr. Jack has called into question the integrity or impartiality of Mayor Fosbrooke and Councillor Gordon on the basis they were at one time directors of SPIRG. He does not state that they both resigned before beginning their electoral campaigns. The public knew this when they elected them as representatives, and particularly in the case of Anna Marie Fosbrooke, who stated in response to direct questions fielded in the All-Candidates meetings, that she was proud to have served the citizens of Southgate in this capacity during difficult times. By removing themselves from discussions related to SPIRG, they have proven their integrity. In fact, at the end of the day, the point that has been missed here is that there is no conflict of interest because neither are involved with SPIRG. Of course, Mr. Jack is entitled to his opinion, but at Council, his opinions should be reflective of the facts before him.

This situation then begs the question ? by virtue of the fact that the Deputy Mayor and Councillor Pallister were both members of the last council, with whom SPIRG had an acrimonious relationship perhaps Mr. Jack and Mr. Pallister should also remove themselves from further discussions related to SPIRG. Unfortunately, their obvious bias in this affair has not been the least bit conducive to bringing about a successful resolution ? as evidenced during the tenure of this Council, and the previous Council.

Indeed, it might be more helpful for Council/Southgate to open negotiations directly with SPIRG. As we all know, a continued adversarial approach is not contributing to a successful resolution. What needs to happen (and sooner rather than later) is for Southgate Council to attend to the business at hand ? the same township business that the collective constituents of Southgate elected the Mayor and Council members to do.

Beth Lindhorst