

CORRIGAN'S CORNER

“Council finally getting vital ‘information’ in city fisco”

PUBLISHED IN THE REPORTER MAY 2002

By Ed Corrigan, Councillor Ward 7

The controversy at City Hall continues to rage as I write my May 2002 Report to you the constituents. I cannot address, for legal reasons, the current status of Acting City Manager Jeff Malpass. It is, however, part of the Council voting record that Councillors Bill Armstrong, Joni Baechler, David Winninger and I were the only four councillors to vote against Jeff Malpass's pay package when he was offered the position of Acting City Manager. This package included \$4,500 per month additional pay plus 8 weeks of vacation on top of \$142,439 salary and benefits he had as Deputy City Manager.

On the City Commissioner John Jardine "retirement" question Councillors Bill Armstrong, Sandy Levin, David Winninger, Susan Eagle and myself (Ed Corrigan) supported Control Swan's motion calling for release of the information on the termination of our Commissioner of the Environment and Transportation's employment. Councillor Harold Usher was on medical leave when the first Jardine vote occurred. I was on holidays when the second vote on the Jardine issue occurred.

The minority "Group of Seven" on City Council, as some have described us, have generally been consistent in demanding more information and calling for a more open and accountable style of government. There was considerable pressure placed on Councillors to support uncritically former City Manager Linda Reed. This support included endorsing the City Manager's refusal to release important financial and employment related information to the elected Council. This refusal in turn led to a number of controversies arising from the forced disclosure of salaries and overtime pay during the strike by the City's Outside Workers.

In early April 2002 a dramatic shift occurred and information previously denied to Council, on various alleged grounds, is now being made accessible to us. Hopefully this access will allow us to address some of the concerns raised by the voting public on issues of overtime and salaries and help City Council make better and informed decisions.

Concerns that I raised many months ago over legal opinions that were being presented to support the withholding of information from Council, which I contested, have been largely validated. At the time I was criticized for daring to challenge the high-priced Toronto legal advice obtained by then City Manager Linda Reed to support her position not to release information about certain management and employment practices at City Hall.

More recently it was disclosed that two years ago the City Management Committee stopped taking the minutes of their meetings. I made a motion to direct the Management Committee to take minutes and to have a written record of their decisions. This motion was defeated by a slight majority of Council. However after I raised the issue Senior Management announced that they were returning to the practice of producing a written record of their deliberations.

For reasons of accountability, consistency and producing a legal record the keeping of minutes of the City's Management Committees decisions is vital. As a taxpayer-funded government accountability is based on proper record keeping and voting on resolutions to enact

policy and political decisions. To me proper record keeping is a question of safe guarding the public purse and ensuring accountability.

Due to concerns raised by a number of councillors and the public Council has directed that KPMG conduct a compliance audit to make sure that Council's policies and directives were being followed. The auditor is also reviewing expenditures, salary and overtime payment practices. This audit may lead to a full Inquiry if it is deemed warranted but Council is finally taking strong steps to get the information it requires to properly run the City. It is gratifying that these concerns are now being addressed.

As a lawyer, and an elected politician, I reserve my right to critically analyze legal opinions that are presented to support any policy or political decision. This duty is what I was elected to do and I will use whatever skills, knowledge and training I have to represent the residents of Ward 7 to the best of my ability. Even if it means asking some tough and unpopular questions. I would like to hear your opinions on these and any other City related matter. I can be reached at City Hall at 661-1558 or at home at 652-0973. My email address is ecorriga@city.london.on.ca