

Committee called on to look at procedural matters

By Bill Rea

Adjusting Caledon council's Procedural Bylaw might sound simple, but Councillor Barb Shaughnessy learned there are a lot of complications.

Shaughnessy put forth three notices of motion at last week's meeting of the General Committee of council. After lengthy, and sometimes heated, discussions and considerable procedural debate, all three were referred back to the Procedural Bylaw Committee of council.

Shaughnessy's first motion dealt with notices of motion. She was calling for provisions to let them be included on council agendas. Under the current rules, they are only allowed on committee agendas. Part of her effort was aimed at reducing the number of walk-on motion, or motions that come up without notice.

In her second motion, Shaughnessy was calling for reinstatement of Public Question Period, and putting it on council and committee agendas right after delegations. This would allow members of the public to comment on issues on the agenda before decisions are made.

The final motion dealt with recorded votes, calling for them to be taken on all decisions (including amendments) voted on by council or committee on all issues, but not on procedural motions. The motion also called on Town staff to look into technology for the recording of votes.

Council heard from a couple of residents supporting the move.

Bolton resident Sherry Brioschi spoke in favour of Question Period, commenting it promotes transparency and good dialogue. She also argued that the councils in Brampton and Mississauga still have Question Period, and pointed out that allowing for 15 minutes for questions is not a big deal.

"The extra 15 minutes on the agenda is worth it," she declared.

Terra Cotta resident John Rutter also called for its reinstatement.

He suggested one of the problems with the format in the past was Question Period came near the end of the agenda.

"Taxpayers should have the chance to ask more questions at meetings," he argued. "We should encourage engagement."

In supporting her motions, Shaughnessy commented there have been a couple of walk-on motions appearing on agendas, with time factors being used to justify them. Creating more opportunities to address notices of motion should help in that regard.

"It looks like a pretty easy slam-dunk for me," she remarked.

Mayor Allan Thompson agreed with the importance to be open and transparent, but he also stressed the need for process. He suggested referring the matter to the Procedural Bylaw Committee.

"Let's go through the process to get it right," he said.

Shaughnessy stressed the need to have a specific date for the committee to report back to councillors.

"I could be here until doom's day," she declared. "I'm not letting this dangle there."

Town Clerk Carey deGorter wasn't able to set definite timeline, but said she could have a date set in time for the next council meeting, set for April 4.

"These are minor changes," Shaughnessy argued, adding there was nothing in any of her motions that would require a review of the procedural Bylaw.

Councillor Rob Mezzapelli, who was chairing the meeting, could see no harm in having a review, nor could he see any reason to exclude other items.

"It's an extremely significant document," he remarked.

Shaughnessy said the committee could meet in the following week. DeGorter pointed out the committee is an advisory committee of council, meaning staff and the public need notice when it meets.

Councillor Annette Groves brought out that if Shaughnessy had not brought forth her motions, there would be no review of the Procedural Bylaw, and she wondered why a full review was needed now.

DeGorter had sent a memo to council, which was included in last Tuesday's agenda, stating the Procedural Bylaw was repealed and replaced in 2016, with the aim to increase efficiencies and enhance public participation.

She also stated that Shaughnessy's three motions "could significantly impact not only transparency levels, but also the administration of meetings."

"Staff have not had enough time to completely consider all the impacts of the proposed changes," she added.

DeGorter also stated if there's a desire to look at changes to the bylaw, it would be prudent to have a complete review.

?We're making a mountain out of a molehill,? Shaughnessy remarked, adding staff could suggest a bylaw review if it wants to and councillors can discuss it.