

Council votes down Mayor's motion to rescind Council compensation increase]

Previous Caledon Council approved 24.5 per cent raise for lawmakers

By Zachary Roman

Caledon Council's compensation increase is here to stay.

At Caledon Council's January 17 General Committee meeting, Mayor Annette Groves tabled a motion to rescind a raise for Mayor and Council approved by Caledon's previous term of Council.

At its General Committee meeting held on July 12, 2022, Caledon's previous Council approved a Town of Caledon staff report recommendation that the Mayor's salary be increased to \$116,830 (from \$98,625) and Councillors' salary be increased to \$49,841 (from \$40,080).

At that meeting, all councillors except Groves (then Ward 5 Regional Councillor) and Ward 5 Councillor Tony Rosa voted in favour of the recommendation. At the time, Groves said she didn't think it was the right time for an increase and that the next term of Council should make a decision on any pay raises.

During her 2022 campaign for Mayor, Groves promised she would bring a motion to Council asking to revert the pay increase, a promise she followed through with at the January 17, 2023 meeting.

Her motion at the meeting asked that "the base salary for members of Council be adjusted to reflect the amount captured prior to the adjustment made in 2022" (and) that these changes take effect for the next pay cycle, February 10, 2023."

Before Groves' motion was tabled, several Caledon community members delegated to Council showing their support for Groves' motion and opposition to the raise.

Enzo Villa told Council that by supporting Groves' motion they'd be showing their fellow Caledon residents that they stand with them.

"Whose best interests will you be looking out for?" he asked.

Cheryl Connors, who ran for Ward 4 Councillor in 2022 and lost to long-time Ward 3/4 incumbent Nick deBoer by 120 votes, was another of the delegates at the meeting and brought with her a Powerpoint presentation. She too was against the raise and asked Caledon Council to "do the right thing" by supporting Groves' motion, noting that taxpayers would be watching their decision.

John Rutter said many people he talked to about the raise in Caledon were unaware it had even happened, and upon finding out about it were shocked and became opposed to it. Rutter said growth coming to Caledon will come in phases and that raises to Council should be phased in, too. He said he and many residents are not against an increase but that the timing and amount of the raise that was approved was quite offensive.

Mayor Groves said she was thankful for the support of her motion from delegates, and said she tabled her motion for many of the reasons delegates brought forward. She said she hoped her Council colleagues would support her motion after hearing from residents.

"My motion wasn't intended to divide our Council," said Groves, noting she's not opposed to a modest increase to reflect cost of living changes. "But we need to lead by example and put ourselves in the shoes of residents who are struggling" many of our (Caledon) families are living paycheque to paycheque."

Ward 4 Councillor Nick deBoer said he would not be supporting Mayor Groves' motion, stating his opinion hadn't changed from 2022 when he voted in favour of the raise. He said when he started on Caledon Council 19 years ago, it was a part-time role, but that now he puts in 40 to 50 hours per week which got him jeers from some residents attending the meeting.

Regional Councillor Christina Early, who chaired the meeting, had to remind residents in attendance to maintain composure and be respectful. deBoer said having a properly-compensated Council helps position Caledon for the future, as it will soon be the fastest growing area in the province.

Ward 3 Councillor Doug Maskell said he was in support of Groves' motion and said when he was campaigning, many residents were astonished to hear of the raise approved in 2022.

"Tough times require tough decisions," said Maskell. "I would ask my fellow Councillors to consider what delegates said? these are times when it's unconscionable to have a 24.5 per cent raise."

Ward 2 Councillor Dave Sheen said it was unfortunate that Mayor Groves brought forward her motion so early into the new Council's term. He said people want the new Council to be united but that no topic is more polarizing than the raise. Sheen said the raise did not come up when he was campaigning in the 2022 election, and that he doesn't see a reason to resurrect the issue.

Ward 1 Councillor Lynn Kiernan said she agreed with Sheen and explained there are some people in her ward who do in fact support the raise. She said her constituents would rather she work on furthering highway safety and mitigating the impacts of Bill 23 than discuss a raise that was already approved. Kiernan said she felt as though delegates did not value the work Councillors do, and that the raise was "used by a slate" as a provocative topic in the 2022 election.

Rosa, who did not support the raise when it was tabled in 2022, said his opinion has not changed and that he'd be supporting Groves' motion to rescind the raise. He said even though being a councillor is a full-time job and requires 24/7 effort to truly support constituents, there should have been more conversation before Council approved a raise in 2022.

Regional Councillor Mario Russo said he'd been spending a lot of time thinking about Groves' motion recently. He echoed Sheen's sentiment that he did not hear about the raise on the campaign trail, and said he could not support Groves' motion as it was tabled. Instead, he said he'd be willing to motion to defer it for 60 days for more consideration.

Early said she wanted to thank the delegates for their presentations and for all the people that reached out to her in support of or against the raise. Early said Caledon has a complexity that Brampton and Mississauga don't have and while she respects Groves for bringing her motion forward, she would not be supporting it.

Russo's motion to defer Groves' motion for 60 days failed to pass. Groves' motion to rescind the raise failed to pass by a vote of five to four. Voting to rescind the raise were Groves, Rosa, Maskell, and Ward 6 Councillor Cosimo Napoli. Voting to keep the raise in effect were Kiernan, Early, Russo, Sheen, and deBoer.

At the time of the 2022 salary adjustment, the last time salaries for Caledon's Mayor and Council were reviewed (other than for annual cost of living adjustments) was in 2015.

Town staff said they initiated a salary review because of Caledon's recent ward boundary review, the decrease of Caledon Regional Councillors from four to two, and to have Caledon be in line with similar municipalities.