

Peel's Chief of Staff responds to 'concerning' comments

OUR READER'S WRITE

As Chief of Staff for the Chair and CEO of the Region of Peel, and the one who oversees the office and our two staff members, I must clarify and correct some very concerning and incomplete information recently reported in the media. I feel it would be irresponsible as Chief of Staff to the Chair and CEO of the Region of Peel, not to provide clarity regarding this important matter.

I acknowledge that it is the will of Council to consider a change to the composition of the position of Regional Chair. I support the decision-making process; however, I feel the office of the Chair and CEO has been misrepresented and devalued. Not to mention, the collective reputation of Council and staff at the Region of Peel. This is not a personal matter, but I have a duty as a civil servant and as the Chief of Staff to provide accurate information to the residents and businesses, because we are here to serve them.

A Regional Councillor recently reported to the media that the position of the Regional Chair and CEO is essentially a part-time job. This Councillor is correct in saying that the Regional Chair is the head of Council and CEO, however, I am perplexed as to why she states that this is a dichotomy. It seems to me that instead of suggesting that it is only a part time position, the Regional Chair and CEO holds the responsibilities of two combined positions of operating a \$3 billion corporation and providing leadership and guidance to staff in carrying out essential services to its Regional population of 1.5 million.

After hearing the Councillor's remarks at Council and reading the articles in the media, I must admit that I personally felt gaslighted. Upon reflection and review with my staff, I wondered: 'Could it be that all we do is put the Chain of Office around his neck and send him off to Council Chambers twice a month?' As important as those are, we checked our records and files and were reminded of the scope of the undertakings of this office on a day-to-day basis throughout a full term.

This is not just my opinion. I have been the Chief of Staff serving under the past two Chairs, and let's not forget the legacy of Emil Kolb and his many years of service to the community. This is not my first rodeo. I have been involved in politics, media and government for the past 30 years. When I worked with the Indigenous community, there were times when what we collectively were trying to accomplish was misunderstood and it was a constant effort to communicate accurate information. In defense of those who have misunderstood, it can happen. I want to be very clear. The Region of Peel has renewed my faith in government. I am witness to the value that both the Councillors and Regional staff provide to the Peel community.

This is why the office of the Chair is so important in supporting both Council and staff as they collaborate to properly govern the people of the Region. The duties of the Regional Chair are far more than just chairing a few meetings per month and attending occasional events. Over the past three years the current Chair has attended almost 400 meetings. As Chief Executive Officer of the Region of Peel, an integral part of his responsibility is to advocate to other levels of government, for support of initiatives and programs, financially and otherwise. Our office liaises closely with our Executive Leadership Team, our Clerks department, and other dedicated and hard-working senior staff in carrying out the decisions of Council. He is the bridge that connects organizations, businesses, external stakeholders, as well as the Provincial and Federal government to the Region of Peel. His strong leadership during the pandemic was vital and not a job that could have been done effectively by a part-time Chair. He has worked closely with Dr. Loh and the Commissioner of Health Services, Nancy Polsinelli and has participated in more than 150 COVID-19 meetings over the past two years. Here is a short list of a few of the programs the Chair has been engaged in over the past year.

COVID-19 management

Climate change initiatives e.g. Electric Vehicles, Carbon Foot Print

Conservation Authorities

GTHA Mayors and Regional Chairs meetings

MARCO

Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO)

Royal Ontario Municipal Association (ROMA)

MP and MPP advocacy.

Peel's Goods Movement Task Force (Smart Freight Centres)

Retail Council of Canada/Supply Chain (Off-Peak Deliveries)

Chair of the Board of Health

Community Safety and Well-being plan

Black North Initiative & BCAN

Peel Police Services Board Member

Housing Initiatives

GTAA engagement

Post-Traumatic Stress Injuries Centre of Excellence

ROPA 30

Highway 50

A significant portion of the misinformation which has been reported relates to budget and has falsely provided the impression that the Regional Chair's office holds a collective salary of almost \$900,000 annually. In actuality, our collective office salary which includes The Chair & CEO and three staff members, including myself, who serve the Chair and Regional Council, is just over \$630,000 annually. That equates to a sizable error in her calculation.

During the current Chair's first year in office, he eliminated a staff position of almost \$200,000 as well as opted out of including an approximately \$400,000 budget for Council Newsletters giving a total of approximately \$600,000 for the term. Had our office been requested to provide a report, we would have gladly provided it to exhibit these budget savings.

I hope this more accurate depiction of the Peel Regional Chair & CEO's role along with the staff that support him and Council will give a clearer understanding to the public and to Peel Regional Council. Before we make this decision, we must be certain to consider all the critical factors of this vital decision, in the best interest of the Region of Peel and its residents.

James Douglas
Chief of Staff

Office of the Region Chair