

Regional councillors respond to letter about police board

By Bill Rea

A group advocating against racial discrimination in Peel is not pleased with coming changes to the Police Services Board, and Regional councillors are not pleased with the group's stand.

Peel Coalition Against Racialized Discrimination (P-CARD) sent a letter to council. It was received with considerable comment last Thursday.

The letter noted that Mississauga Councillor Sue McFadden is due to sit on the Board, but P-CARD wants Mayor Bonnie Crombie to remain there, arguing it would provide continuity and public confidence.

The letter added a motion was passed to the effect that Crombie and McFadden would share the term on the board, but it stated the move "would be unwise and unfortunate for the public residents."

P-CARD also pointed out Brampton Mayor Susan Jeffrey also sits on the board. They said having the two mayors on the board "when fundamental improvements to policing are taking place is crucial to ensuring that Peel residents are well represented by the leadership that it elected."

"This is not to diminish the role of a councillor," the letter stated, "but a mayor has an expected role of leadership that is not perceived by the public as being the same role as councillor."

The letter also referred to the fact that Peel Regional Police do not operate in Caledon, and argued councillors from Caledon "should have no say on an important Brampton-Mississauga issue."

Several Regional councillors were upset by the letter, especially McFadden, who said it was "defamatory, disrespectful and insulting to me personally, the Peel Police Services Board and Regional council."

She added she was disappointed that this group, that seems interested in finding common ground would issue a letter stating her sitting on the board would be a step backwards without ever contacting her.

"This negative approach sounds more like alienating me rather than finding common ground," she said, adding council respects her, and that was demonstrated when she was voted to the board.

Brampton Councillor Gael Miles called the letter "unfortunate," adding there was a commitment between McFadden and Crombie that was endorsed by council.

She also said she had confidence that McFadden would perform well on the board.

"To me, it's a slap in the face to the decision making that we made around here," Brampton Councillor Grant Gibson remarked. He also wondered how a letter like that made it to the council agenda.

Regional Chair Frank Dale said if a letter is received addressed to him and members of council, it automatically goes on the agenda. Brampton Councillor John Sprovieri wondered if there shouldn't be some screening before such material gets that far.

"I don't know who these people are, and what they do, and what their reputation is or what their beefs are," he said, referring to P-CARD. "They're the problem, not Councillor McFadden."

"I took exception to it," Caledon Councillor Barb Shaughnessy commented, reading the references that Caledon should have no input on the matter. "I felt that's real insulting."

Shaughnessy also told McFadden she's confident she'll do a "great job."

"Good on you to make that statement," Caledon Mayor Allan Thompson told McFadden. "It's bold."

He also charged the letter was misleading.

"We are policed by the Region of Peel," he declared. "We are part of the Police Services Board."

Regional Solicitor and Director of Legal Services Patrick O'Connor confirmed the Police Services Act allows for the contract between Peel and OPP "to serve Caledon, adding the board has an oversight role.

There was little enthusiasm among councillors for keeping such letters off the agendas. Brampton Councillor Martin Medeiros said P-CARD has concerns and they should be able to voice their opinions to council.

Dale said he planned to continue the current practice.

"I know you'll be a good addition to the Police Services Board," he told McFadden. "You're a person who does their homework. You're a quick learner."