

Town and firefighters wait for decision in double-hatter case

By Bill Rea

The arguments have been made and judgement is pending from a union tribunal in the case of some volunteer firefighters in Caledon and the International Association of Firefighters Local 1068 (Brampton).

Town of Caledon CAO Mike Galloway said both sides made their case to the tribunal Monday, adding they have 30 days to reach a decision. He said he didn't expect they will have to wait that long.

The argument put forth by the Town stated volunteer firefighters with the Town who are also employed full-time with the fire department in Brampton have been charged with violating the rules of their union. They could be subject to expulsion from the union.

The Town's position, details of which were provided to the Citizen, state "it is a recognized fundamental of Canadian law that where the terms of a contract conflict with a statute, the contractual terms are void and unenforceable."

The Town's position further stated Bill 109, Employment and Labour Statute Act of 2015 was passed with an intention to protect double-hatters "from arbitrary and discriminatory actions by their union."

Double-hatters, also sometimes known as two-hatters, are full-time professional firefighters who also volunteer their off-duty time answering calls in their home communities.

Mayor Allan Thompson has pointed out that there are about 250 volunteer firefighters working in Caledon, and some of them are full-time firefighters elsewhere.

Mandy Gould, a volunteer with 13 years standing at the station in Inglewood, is one of the people up on charges.

"I love being a firefighter," she said. "I am proud to wear the Caledon patches and carry the title of District Chief."

She added she has a sense of responsibility to the community in which she was raised, as well as a sense of loyalty to other firefighters she works with.

Gould also indicated firefighting is in her family.

"My father was a volunteer firefighter for 25 years," she said. "I watched him leave our Christmases, birthdays and family gatherings to help neighbours, friends and complete strangers. What an admirable quality for someone to give 25 years of service to their community!"

"I wanted to do the same," she added. "Being a volunteer firefighter defines a huge part of my life. One of my fellow colleagues said it perfectly at our trial . . . 'To us (firefighting) is not a job. It's a lifestyle'."

Gould added it's hard to deal with union trying to tell her what she can or can't do on her own time.

"I can do anything in my spare time but firefighting, which I am trained to do," she observed.

Galloway wouldn't speculate on what the decision will be, although he did say there would be options, depending on the ruling.

"We're not predetermining the outcome," he said.

Attempts to obtain comments from representatives of Local 1068 were unsuccessful.