

Pickering council off to shaky start

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PICKERING -- It was only the first business meeting of the council term Monday and tensions were already high.

Ward 2 Regional Councillor Bill McLean accused the mayor and local councillors of secretly meeting and creating a voting bloc this council term.

In at least five cases at the meeting, the three regional councillors voted together on committee and board appointments, while the three local councillors and the mayor voted the other way.

"It's obvious the mayor and the local council has to a good degree agreed on what they want and how the City will be run over the next four years," Coun. McLean said.

Ward 2 City Councillor Doug Dickerson later pointed out the three regional councillors voted together on many appointments, and called Coun. McLean's accusations a disservice to the residents.

"This is the start of a new term and quite frankly, it doesn't need to start under a cloud," he said in an interview.

Coun. McLean was quick to retaliate.

"If last night was any indication of what's to come, then it's not me who's doing the disservice," he said.

Ward 3 City Councillor David Pickles argued many of the other appointments had a good general consensus among council, and noted some of the committees were mixed up.

"There was a lot of change-up, which I think is a good thing," he said in an interview.

He disagreed that bloc voting will continue throughout the term.

"I think there will be different combinations," he said.

One instance of the same councillors voting together was Mayor Dave Ryan's appointment to the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority. The three local councillors and the mayor voted for his appointment, whereas the three regional councillors voted for Ward 1 Regional Councillor Jennifer O'Connell. It was a similar case when the three local councillors were appointed to the Civic Awards committee, beating out the regional councillors who were nominated.

Coun. Pickles nominated Coun. Dickerson as acting mayor. Coun. O'Connell suggested the three regional councillors split the duty over the term, but the local councillors and Mayor Ryan voted for Coun. Dickerson, giving him the job.

"(This) deal was in the day after the election," Coun. McLean said. "That's when things started happening."

Mayor Ryan said Pickering will go through a challenging time in the next term, planning for Seaton and the downtown core, for example, and felt Coun. Dickerson's knowledge and experience were best for the job.

"I can assure you and every member that sits here, I have not made any promises or deals as you have (indicated)," he said to Coun. McLean.

At the meeting, Coun. O'Connell asked why a local councillor in 2010 is able to be acting mayor, when that wasn't the case in 2006 when she put forward Coun. Dickerson's name for the role, and was shut down. City Clerk Debbie Shields, who was not the clerk at the time, said she'd look into it.

Ms. Shields said while traditionally, regional councillors get the job, local councillors are also eligible. She said the role of acting mayor, whether represented by a local or regional councillor, excludes meetings.

Coun. Dickerson said although he would have preferred unanimous support, he's honoured with the position.

"I know the workload will increase but that's the challenge of it and that's the call I'm up to and want to undertake," he said.

Mayor Ryan, Coun. Dickerson, Coun. Pickles and Ward 1 City Councillor Kevin Ashe were appointed to the Veridian board of directors.

Recorded votes and all appointments can be found in the minutes at www.cityofpickering.com.