

Metroland News

Rules change after what mayor calls a staff and council "oversight"

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By Jennifer Stone

CLARINGTON -- Members of council, including the mayor, may chair fledgling committees for the first six months on an interim basis until they get rolling, part of new rules which received preliminary approval on Monday.

But in the case of Clarington's Green Living committee, which has met under Mayor Jim Abernethy's chairmanship since last September, the six months starts now.

Residents, including some members of the committee, had come forward to state concerns with the mayor chairing the committee since the rules explicitly stated members of council must not hold the position.

Not only did Mayor Abernethy take the job, but he admitted to having his executive assistant call committee members before the meeting at which voting took place, to lobby to put the mayor in the chair.

The matter was raised by Orono resident Linda Gasser during a November Green Living Committee meeting but nothing was done immediately. Then, last week, a report came forward from staff, recommending disregarding the rules. The recommendation was voted down and the issue was sent back to staff, who then recommended allowing members of council sit as chairperson for the first 18 months when a new committee is formed.

"I think 18 months is a little extravagant," Ward 4 Councillor Gord Robinson said. "I think six months is sufficient for a board to get their feet underneath them."

This shouldn't have been a big issue, said the mayor.

"I think there's been a lot more made out of this than what should have been made," he said. "This was an oversight. It was an oversight by staff and it was an oversight by this council. This council approved me as being chair."

Not good enough, said Ms. Gasser.

"I'm stunned the mayor has chosen to present this as being an oversight by staff and council," she said, noting there were opportunities between when she raised the issue in November and now to rectify the situation.

"It's everybody else's fault? Really?"