

## **Advisory committee chairmanship up for debate**

### **Mayor lobbied for position, but shouldn't have the job: committee member**

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By Jennifer Stone

CLARINGTON -- If the rules are the rules, Clarington's mayor should be following them, say members of the public.

At issue is Mayor Jim Abernethy's chairmanship of Clarington's new Green Community Advisory Committee.

The mayor admits to having his executive assistant call and lobby committee members to place him in the chair. That's despite rules that say no member of council, including the mayor, may act as chairman of a community advisory committee.

It's a role which should go to a member of the general public, said Ron Collis, a member of the committee.

"I'm surprised that the concept of having a chairman who's from the community who sits on the advisory committee to the municipality isn't in council's mind basically a no-brainer -- of course it has to be the case," said Mr. Collis, who spoke to Clarington's General Purpose and Administration committee Monday.

The community advisory role of the committee is undermined by having a politician in the chair driving the agenda, said Mr. Collis.

He wasn't alone. Orono resident Jim Richards, who has called the mayor on the carpet for not following rules in past, asked if Mayor Abernethy felt "that rules apply to everybody but himself."

Advisory committees oughtn't be in any way political, he said.

"How will the public accept the findings of this committee, if it's perceived as a tool for the mayor's office," asked Mr. Richards. "I suggest that what might otherwise be accepted as valid and serious recommendations forthcoming from this committee might be scoffed at and I feel this committee's stated purpose and mandate are far too important to take this chance."

Mr. Collis was among the committee members who received a phone call from the mayor's office, lobbying to place the mayor in the position.

"The fact that Mayor Abernethy essentially lobbied for the position of chair(man) prior to the committee ever even meeting is, in my opinion, very wrong," he said.

The mayor said he did ask his executive assistant to make the phone calls, as he "felt this was a very important committee that needed some strong leadership."

He gave the committee the opportunity to reconsider its chairmanship, Mayor Abernethy said.

A staff report on the issue supports having the mayor remain as chairman. The report was voted down and the issue has been referred back to staff.

No one else put their name forward to chair the group. But, one councillor wondered if that's because others might have felt somewhat intimidated.

"Would you not believe that no one stepped forward, knowing that you had already contacted some people on the committee, saying that you would like to take the position," asked Regional Councillor Charlie Trim.

That could be, said the mayor.

"That's a fair assumption. I don't disagree with that," said Mayor Abernethy.

Another member of the committee, Elva Reid, said the mayor's high profile made him an ideal candidate for the chairmanship. The group is concerned with environmental, not procedural, issues, she said.

"We are a group of volunteers thinking globally and acting locally," she said. "We don't want to spend our time dotting our 'i's and crossing our 't's," Ms. Reid said.