

Metroland Editorial

Changing the rules to accommodate himself is wrong

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Clarington Mayor Jim Abernethy has knowingly flaunted the rules since last fall regarding his chairmanship of the Green Living committee.

He lobbied for and was granted the post despite knowing it was a clear violation of the rules. When it was brought to his attention, he took months to address the problem. And when he couldn't avoid the bad publicity any longer, what did he do? He had the rules changed to accommodate himself.

Yet the community, in his words, is making a lot more out of it than it should.

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 to sit as chairman for the first 18 months when a new committee is formed.

Eighteen months is a long time when the chairman has the power to basically influence exactly what type of work the committee accomplishes or doesn't. We've all witnessed what happens when the mayor doesn't like or agree with delegations before council. He kicks them out and demands letters of apology. One can only imagine what he would do if members didn't agree with him on the Green Living Committee.

The steady stream of letters flowing into our newsroom is enough to give anyone pause for thought. Given that most of these letters are from residents not affiliated with committees or special interest groups, they speak volumes about how the electorate views the issue.

When offered the opportunity to defend his actions, the mayor refused. Through his secretary the mayor said he's said all he wants to about the issue. He apparently doesn't enjoy participating in things he can't control.

When Mayor Abernethy was first elected we had high hopes he would bring a fresh perspective and ideas to the council table. He didn't. Council is more fractured now than it ever was and the mayor is making up or changing the rules as he goes along.

Councillors must do a better job of keeping this man in check. The community cannot be expected to keep the mayor accountable because that's not its job. Rules should not be ignored, otherwise what good are they?

Are there other rules not being followed by his worship that we haven't discovered? Possibly. Would he ever admit it on his own? It's doubtful.

-- *Clarington This Week*