

SP CW (WORKING SESSION)

Subject: FW: CofW ratepayers policy

May 20, 2014

ITEM: 1

From: Carrie [<mailto:carrie.liddy@sympatico.ca>]

Sent: Tuesday, May 20, 2014 4:01 PM

To: Bevilacqua, Maurizio; Abrams, Jeffrey; Racco, Sandra; deb.shulte@vaughan.ca; Carella, Tony; marilyn.iafrates@vaughan.ca; Rosati, Gino; Shefman, Alan

Subject: CofW ratepayers policy

Dear Mayor and Members of Vaughan Council

I am providing this written deputation in advance of tonight's meeting on Ratepayers Associations.

Please circulate to the public.

Ratepayers Associations provide a fundamental role in good governance. Public feedback is sadly lacking in Vaughan.

Expressions of opinions are met with lawsuits, and people are targeted for their views. I speak from personal experience when I say this.

The City of Vaughan since the 2010 election has held a closed meeting at every meeting of Council. Closed meetings are intended to be the exception, and in Vaughan, they are the rule.

Issues of major public importance such as the hospital, spending of tax dollars and lawsuits are discussed and decisions made behind closed doors.

There is little, if any, accountability of hundreds of millions of our tax dollars. The issue being so serious, that proper disclosure on millions of dollars of taxpayer money raised and spent with regards to the mayor's galas, is now in the hands of the Attorney General.

Vaughan Mayor wrote and publicly promoted the Vaughan Accord and yet to date, I have yet to receive even one response from Mayor Bevilacqua to even one email or phone call I made on these serious issues.

I bring these items up, as they are directly relevant to what I contend is occurring with the situation with a Ratepayer Associations in Vaughan.

Ratepayer Association are valid and important vehicles for taxpayers to participate in Vaughan's governance. Vaughan Council, in not only attempting to control the public participation, but making it near impossible for these valid vehicles to put forward public opinion.

The City of Vaughan agreed to a task force, didn't participate in the lengthy process, and now, challenges the outcome reached through time consuming consensus. Ironically, this is but yet another example of Vaughan Council's attempts to shut down public participation.

It is essential to a proper and healthy government to embrace public participation, even if that participation means holding each of you accountable or putting forward opinions that disagree with Vaughan Council.

I cite the casino as an example of this. How many months and how many hours of staff time was spent on promoting the casino? A full blown survey was done, and trips were made, and many internal meetings held. Council pushed for a casino. Council used our tax dollars to promote the casino.

Other items of real importance were thrown by the wayside while Council and senior staff spent their working hours on promoting the casino.

The problem with this is that the Public didn't want a casino. In the final vote, the casino was supported by only the Mayor. He used the excuse that Vaughan Council committed to the casino and withdrawing was going to cause problems with Vaughan's reputation.

The real problem with the casino was that the public didn't want a casino from the first day the idea was raised. Public participation for those voices that objected to the casino was systemically shut down.

In the final analysis, the Mayor absolutely reached the wrong conclusion. It was the lack of proper public participation that caused the problem. Council's agreement to put Vaughan on the short list for a casino should never have happened without extensive and proper public participation.

If ratepayer groups had been consulted and actually listened to, Vaughan Council would have known from the beginning that the public did not want a casino. The thousands of man hours and tax dollars spent wouldn't have been wasted if public participation was actually and properly embraced.

The fault was not that Vaughan Council moved forward in bad faith, as the Mayor stated in his deputation on the final vote, but the fault was that Vaughan Council /staff controlled public participation to eliminate the voices that really mattered.

Vaughan Council needs to learn from the casino outcome. Vaughan Council needs to actively promote public participation.

Vaughan Council should implement the task force recommendations in their entirety without change.

With regards to governance of ratepayers, I note two clauses 8 and 9. Clause 8 provides for ratepayer associations to be self-governing. The City should not govern ratepayer association when the task force developed a self-governing model. City staff should not be involved in making determinations as to which members of the public can participate and who cannot. Clause 9 from the task force is a mechanism to hold ratepayers accountable to public. This is important and needs to remain as is.

Checks and balances have been developed in the task force recommendations. Council changing this report, will again prove that public participation is being shut down and not promoted in the City of Vaughan.

At a minimum, the task force recommendations need to be implemented in full, and the city can review how the process is working, after a reasonable evaluation period of time. The City council could make changes should it be necessary after the recommendations are allowed to work and re-evaluated in a year or two.

Staff should NOT be given the power to change this policy without council's approval. Public participation is important and policies such as this need to be changed under strenuous public debate, not done by staff's unilateral decisions.

I dare say that history will repeat itself should Vaughan Council continue to shut down public participation.

Thank you and I look forward to tonight's debate on public participation.

Sent from my iPad