

# Freeze council wage: Ootes

## 'Symbolic' gesture right for economic times

By BRYN WEESE, SUN MEDIA

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Are Toronto city councillors worth \$100,000 a year?

Unless a veteran municipal politician gets his way tomorrow, that's close to what councillors will earn this year -- a \$2,348.58 increase over last year.

However, Councillor Case Ootes is introducing a motion at tomorrow's city council meeting to freeze councillors' salaries and reject an automatic 2.42% cost-of-living salary adjustment.

Sun City Hall columnist Sue-Ann Levy nailed down the percentage increase yesterday with city finance staff.

Councillors make \$96,805.02, but with the increase they'll be pulling in \$99,153.60. Mayor David Miller earns \$163,040.02, but with the increase his salary will be \$166,985.

Ootes said his proposed salary freeze was a "symbolic" gesture, but it would send a strong message to Torontonians that city council is taking this economic crisis seriously.

"I think it's incumbent upon civic leaders to show leadership and show restraint as an example to others," he said. "I'm not suggesting councillors are overpaid, that's not the issue. These are serious economic conditions, and we have to be aware that we are the leaders of the community and our citizens, many of them, are going to go without jobs, they won't have an income at all."

But to even debate and vote on the motion tomorrow will require the support of two-thirds of councillors, otherwise it will be referred to the executive committee where it will likely be "received" and effectively killed.

Mayor Miller will not be supporting the motion, though he has pledged repeatedly not to accept his increase of \$3,944.98.

Stuart Green, a spokesman for the mayor, said Ootes' motion is redundant because "the mechanisms for a salary freeze are (already) in place and available to any councillor that wants to freeze his or her salary."

'MAKE A STATEMENT'

But Ootes isn't satisfied letting council members decide for themselves.

"It's important for council to make a statement, as well as individuals," he said. "I know he (Miller) is forgoing his increase, and I will be foregoing my increase regardless of what council decides, but it's important for council as a whole to set the example."

Councillor Kyle Rae said freezing salaries as a symbolic gesture demeans the work councillors do. He added the annual automatic cost-of-living salary adjustment was approved by council years ago and said it's a waste of time to rehash the same argument.

"These members of council, who treat the job as gravy rather than as work, I just don't have time for," Rae said, suggesting several councillors who support the motion receive pensions from previous careers they held in the private sector.

In the past, councillors Frances Nunziata, Cesar Palacio, David Shiner, Michael Walker, Mike Feldman, Karen Stintz, Cliff Jenkins, Doug Holyday, Peter Milczyn and Ootes have said they would support a salary freeze. Councillors Gord Perks, Shelley Carroll and Miller have said in the past they would not accept their pay increases, but wouldn't support a salary freeze.

In 2006, council passed a 8.9% pay hike, which raised councillors' pay from \$87,214 to \$95,000. With last year's cost-of-living increase, councillors now make \$96,805.02 and Miller earns \$163,040.

In February 2006, Walker tried to introduce a motion to roll back the 8.9% pay hike. He failed to keep it from being referred to the Executive Committee -- where it died on a 28 to 14 vote.

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