

# Council hates the 'R' word

Little support for Case Ootes' motion to refuse a pay hike and show some symbolic restraint

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Tomorrow at their monthly meeting Coun. Case Ootes will put forward a motion asking that councillors not take their 2.42% cost of living increase this year.

That increase -- finally confirmed yesterday by city payroll director Ivana Zanardo -- will bump city councillor salaries from \$96,805.02 to \$99,153.60 this year. It is retroactive to Jan. 1.

Ootes tried to bring forward a similar motion at the December council meeting but was told by Her Royal Speakerness, Sandra Bussin, it wasn't time-sensitive. He's back for a second try, insisting the move -- while symbolic and one which will only save the city about \$103,000 this year -- is nevertheless critical during this economic crisis.

"We as councillors need to set an example," he said. "People are losing their jobs, people are taking pay cuts and for us to freeze our salaries for at least this year is not a big sacrifice."

He said the move will have tremendous "symbolic significance" insofar as ongoing negotiations with the two CUPE unions (Locals 416 and 79) are concerned and hopes Mayor David Miller will lobby his caucus to support it.

"I think it's incumbent upon the mayor to convince council this is the right thing to do," added Ootes, who plans not to take his increase even if his motion fails.

But leadership is a relative word at Socialist Silly Hall. Not wanting, yet again, to wade into something remotely controversial for fear of losing the loyalty of his compliant caucus, Miller plans not to "pass comment" on the motion.

That's the word from his spokesman, Stuart Green, who said the mayor has shown leadership by freezing his salary at \$163,040.02 but that he won't support Ootes' motion.

"It's redundant ... there's a mechanism in place that allows councillors to freeze their salaries as they wish," he said. "He's (the mayor's) not prepared to ask them or force them to do anything."

(Strange words, considering how much the mayor is known to bully councillors into seeing the world his way when it suits his personal agenda.)

Budget chief Shelley Carroll who, to her credit, plans not to take her increase this year, won't be openly asking her colleagues to do the same, either. She told me yesterday she believes her actions and those of the mayor will set the tone for others.

Sadly, I think not.

## TWO-THIRDS VOTE

The motion needs a two-thirds vote to even be considered at this council meeting and not be referred to (a big black hole) at executive committee.

In my 11 years covering the foibles at City Hall, I have never once seen councillors -- particularly those in the mushy middle or on the left of centre politically -- voluntarily give up a single pay hike or perq.

As I was reminded this past December by deputy mayor Joe Pantalone, Coun. Frank DiGiorgio and Coun. Pam McConnell, they are very much entitled to their pay hikes and in fact need them to put food on the table (the latter comment coming from McConnell.)

Now, to be fair, a few councillors in addition to Ootes have indicated they intend not to take their 2.42% hike, even if the council motion fails.

They include Frances Nunziata, Rob Ford, Giorgio Mammoliti, Mike Del Grande, Ron Moeser and Chin Lee.

But others think it quite fine to take their 2.42% hike if the motion fails, rationalizing that a clear statement about restraint can only be made if it comes from council as a whole.

Even Coun. Karen Stintz, who seconded Ootes' motion, won't voluntarily take a pay freeze.

"If we can collectively come together as a group to make that statement (about restraint) I would be part of that," she said. "To donate my salary is not the statement I'm looking to make."

Ditto for councillors John Parker and Mike Feldman, who told me if everyone else takes their pay hike, they will too.

Look, either you're willing to freeze your pay, or you're not.

## REMEMBER CONSTITUENTS

Perhaps they should be thinking about how their constituents will view this apparent case of "talking out of both sides of one's mouth."

As Ootes notes, maybe all councillors should also be considering that many of their constituents really are having trouble putting food on their tables.

"Our salaries are guaranteed at least until 2010," he said. "We're now into a recession ... it's an opportunity for council to show leadership."

And restraint, dammit, restraint.

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