

Campaign cash rules debated in midtown

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Council mulls union, corporate donation ban

By [Kris Scheuer](#)

After years of debate, city council is once again considering banning corporate and union donations to candidates in municipal election campaigns.

Looking at the last election, the percentage of funding Toronto councillors took from developers, corporations and unions varied widely.

In the 2006 campaign, eight councillors, including Michael Walker and Cliff Jenkins, raised all their funds through individuals. Mayor David Miller also raised his \$1,029,300 through 1,770 donations from individuals.

On the other side of the scale, Councillor Frances Nunziata relied the most on corporations with 72 percent of her campaign financed through these donations.

Locally, Toronto Centre-Rosedale councillor Kyle Rae ran a campaign through individual donations only. But he's not a big advocate for the reforms.

"I'm indifferent. I've run both ways," he said Jan. 27 during a break at city council. "There's a small (group) of self-appointed moralists on council who think corporate donations shouldn't be permitted."

He thinks banning corporate and union contributions will make it harder for newcomers to raise money.

"For someone who is a new candidate, you need to fling the door as wide open as possible," Rae said. "This narrowing favours incumbency."

Rae also stated donations don't influence how he votes on policies.

"When I had donations from corporations and unions, I didn't make decisions based on donors," he said. "I didn't have a list in a drawer or in front of me when I made decisions."

Councillor John Parker raised less than a quarter of his campaign funds through corporations in the last election (see sidebar). He said there's no need for more rules.

"I don't think these changes will make the system any cleaner than it is already. It would just make it more complicated," said Parker, who represents Don Valley West, which includes Rosedale, Thorncliffe and Flemingdon.

The city has a financial disclosure website that publicly lists where all donations over \$100 come from. The maximum donation anyone can give per councillor is \$750.

"Can influence be bought for \$750?" Parker said. "I can't be bought for \$750."



COUNCILLORS Kyle Rae, left, and Michael Walker raised all their 2006 election funds from individuals.

Council passed a policy for the 2006 election that rebates would no longer be offered to corporate or union donors.

One group pushing for these reforms is Vote Toronto, which held a press conference Jan. 12 to launch a new report available at www.votetoronto.ca.

“I am not cynical enough to think \$750 can buy a politician’s vote,” said Robert MacDermid, the York University associate professor of political science who researched 2006 election funding in 10 municipalities and authored the report.

But he expressed dismay developers concentrate their donations to high-profile candidates and electing them makes council more development-friendly.

“What is being taken from democracy is a range of views that would be there without corporate donations,” said MacDermid, whose research tracked \$10 million in donations to 672 candidates.

He opposes the fact company owners can give through their organization and again as an individual. “Why does some sort of wealth holding give you a right to donate more often?” MacDermid asked.

As a whole, all Toronto candidates, winners and losers, in the 2006 election received 12.1 percent of their funding from corporations compared to 68.2 percent from individuals.

By contrast, in Pickering, 76.7 percent of campaign funding came from corporations and 18 percent from individual donors.

Back in 2004, Toronto city council voted to ban corporate and union campaign donations but did not have the power to make the policy change for the 2006 election. The province has since given the city the authority to pass a new bylaw before the 2010 election.

A vote on the new proposal is expected in the fall.

Where the cash to campaign came from

There’s a debate about banning corporate and union donations raging at city hall. Here’s a peek at how your reps received funding in the 2006 election.

Don Valley West councillor John Parker raised \$32,125 through 84 donations. Of that, 77 percent came from individuals. He got almost 23 percent from corporations including \$500 from a numbered company (2034055 Ontario Ltd.) with offices on Leslie St. As well, he received \$500 from the Ontario Convenience Stores Association and \$750 from Pizza Pizza.

Toronto-Centre Rosedale councillor Kyle Rae raised one hundred percent of his funds through 143 individuals.

In contrast, Councillor Giorgio Mammoliti received \$83,419 through 141 contributions. In his case, 68 percent came from corporations, including a series of numbered companies and \$750 from Greenwin Property Management.

This information is based on all disclosed donations over \$100. Contributions below this amount were not included in Vote Toronto’s research data or the city’s financial disclosure election website.

Source: app.toronto.ca/EFD/main.do and Vote Toronto, www.votetoronto.ca.

This article also found in:

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