

# Will council freeze their pay?

Only two city politicians on left set to take the lead and go without next year's salary boost

By **SUE-ANN LEVY**

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Two weeks ago -- when I endeavoured to reach Joe Pantalone about another column -- I was told he was in Florida on city business.

The Exhibition Place czar finally told me -- a week and several calls later -- that he'd spent five days in Orlando at the International Association of Amusement Parks and Attractions meeting.

It didn't matter to me whether he'd been to the planet Uranus and back. It was clear that, like Mayor David Miller, the deputy mayor wasn't going to let the current fiscal downturn deter his jet-setting in the slightest.

So when I asked him this past week at council whether he'd be willing to forgo his inflationary pay hike next year given the economic climate -- that is, to set an example for the bulk of city employees whose contracts are up for renewal -- I suspected he would not be amused.

"I don't have a comment at the moment," he bristled.

He also accused me of writing only "five stories" on a revolving basis -- and this was one of them.

(I wouldn't dare suggest it's always the same old story with the deputy mayor. This pompous has-been with a bad case of "entitlement syndrome" will never get it.)

Pantalone aside, the question is indeed timely since the 2009 inflationary pay hike for councillors will be set around the third week in January, once the final cost-of-living figures for 2008 are out. By my calculations, that pay hike could be as much as 3%.

It's also reasonable to expect Toronto councillors to absorb some pain after handing citizens and business owners a bucketful of creative new taxes and laws this past year.

It's not as if we need to hold tag days for any of them seeing as their pay jumped 8.9% from \$87,214 to \$95,000 a year in 2007 and they currently earn \$96,805.02.

However don't expect much leadership on the issue from our feckless mayor, who never wants to exercise his strong mayoral powers when it might lead to backlash from his loyal minions.

## MAYOR STANDS PAT

His spokesperson, Stuart Green, said the mayor -- who took the same 8.9% increase in his pay in 2007 -- plans to freeze his \$163,040 salary and his office budget next year. But he said Miller will not spearhead a move to ask councillors to do the same.

My money is on the raise going through, as always.

For when Coun. Case Ootes tried to put forward a notice of motion at council this week on that exact matter, Her Royal Speakerness Sandra Bussin wouldn't allow it because she didn't consider it time-sensitive. Ootes said he plans to bring forward the motion at the next council meeting. But that won't occur until Jan. 27.

Councillors Frances Nunziata, Cesar Palacio, David Shiner, Michael Walker, Mike Feldman, Karen Stintz, Cliff Jenkins, Doug Holyday and Peter Milczyn told me they're also solidly behind the idea.

Yet other than Coun. Gord Perks, who also said he'd agree to go without next year's raise, the left-wingers I spoke with were either flatly against the idea or non-committal.

"I'm not prepared to support it," said Pam McConnell. "We still have to buy the milk and cheese to go on the table."

(It's all too tempting. That's a pretty cheesy remark from someone who milks her expense budget for all it's worth.)

Glenn De Baeremaeker said this is the wrong time to be cutting people's wages whether they be politicians, janitors or truck drivers. (Not that I asked about cutting wages.)

"We need people to have wages to spend money and buy things so we can keep the economy going," he said.

Coun. Giorgio Mammoliti said he had to talk to his kids and wife before deciding. "I'll leave it up to my children ... I'll ask them over dinner," he said.

Adam Giambone said he'd have to consider it. "I'll get back to you," he said. (I'm still waiting.)

## FREEZE UNLIKELY

Ditto for councillors Gloria Lindsay Luby (who said she didn't know when she'd have an answer) and Raymond Cho.

Milczyn said showing some belt-tightening doesn't hurt. But he agreed a freeze is not likely to happen.

"We don't have any money problems (at City Hall) ... and we have to do our bit to bolster the economy," he said. "God forbid

councillors do less Christmas shopping this year ... it could have a devastating effect on the city of Toronto."

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