



Fired township CAO fires back

By VALERIE MACDONALD, NORTHUMBERLAND TODAY

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HAMILTON TOWNSHIP -- For the first time, ousted former Hamilton Township chief administrative officer Betty McIntosh has spoken out on her own behalf since the surprise split-council decision to fire her this past spring.

It follows the official rescinding of bylaws Tuesday night appointing her to her former positions, paving the way for her replacement.

In a letter faxed to the township office Wednesday, and dated July 6, McIntosh wrote to council stating, in part: "While any lengthy relationship will have its bumps and unexpected turns, I am completely at a loss to explain what has happened over the last three months.

"To think my entire professional career and reputation could be turned on its head without even knowing what I did wrong still seems inconceivable in a municipal democracy."

McIntosh's letter goes on to state that "without notice" she was terminated from her positions as CAO, deputy treasurer and deputy clerk on April 19.

"I was advised that the termination would be effective immediately and was provided with no explanation of why I was being terminated. The first 'official' explanation that was provided to me was when the deputy mayor (Isobel Hie) advised the 'Northumberland Today' newspaper that I was terminated because the council had 'lost confidence' in me. I have never been advised of the reason for my termination nor have I been provided with any opportunity to respond to any issue that could have caused the council 'to lose confidence' in my abilities.

"After 23 years of service to the township and its council, I expected council to advise me of their concerns and offer me an opportunity to respond before terminating me," she wrote.

Both in McIntosh's letter and in an interview and correspondence with McIntosh's lawyer, Julian Falconer of the high-profile Toronto firm, Falconer Charney LLP, the two say they requested a chance to speak to council before its members passed the bylaw to rescind those bylaws putting in her former positions as CAO, deputy treasurer and deputy mayor -but this was denied.

(Council rescinded those bylaws of 2004 and 2009 in a split decision Tuesday night with Hie and new Councillors Donna Cole and John Davison continuing to support McIntosh's dismissal and Mayor Mark Lovshin and Councillor Gary Woods continuing to oppose it.)

"This case is a perfect example of how loyal civil servants with impeccable credentials can be dragged through the mud by politics," Falconer said of McIntosh during Wednesday's interview.

"It is beyond me how you could treat a person with a 23- year-old history like Ms. McIntosh's in this fashion, including terminating them, without letting them know the allegations -or giving any chance to respond."

His firm asked for the chance to speak either in-camera or in public with council before the bylaws were rescinded Tuesday and on its own, independent legal advice, council denied them the opportunity, Falconer said.

"It's simply appalling," he said.

McIntosh's lawyer also confirmed that on June 16 libel notices were sent to council as a whole - plus individually to its deputy mayor.

"We put the township on notice of defamatory proceedings," Falconer said.

McIntosh has refused to comment publically until this time and had not responded to inquiries from this newspaper for an interview. Falconer said she is not giving interviews but is letting her letter speak for itself.

"In light of what has been reported in the media, it would appear that I have been made an unwitting pawn in a political power-play between feuding factions of council. While this feud has impacted me severely, I can only hope that the council will be able to come together in order to work for the common benefit of the people of the Township of Hamilton. The people of this great township deserve no less.

"I believe I have been mistreated by this council and offered none of the fairness that I believe you, as individuals, would request if you were terminated from your positions. I have been offered no explanation(s) for this treatment, nor any apology for how the council has handled this matter. I can only hope that in the future, the council treats its employees with a modicum of respect, remembering above all else, that all township employees are people and deserving of fair treatment.

"I urge council to reconsider not only my future, but the future of this proud township."

Despite past motions from Woods and discussions involving Lovshin, both attempting to reverse the majority council decision to fire McIntosh and describing the devastating impact on township employees, there was no discussion last night when bylaws appointing her to her former positions were rescinded in a recorded vote.

Lovshin did, however, inform Hie that interviews to hire an interim CAO would be held Thursday beginning at 10 a.m. An acting treasurer, Fran Aird, has been appointed by the township after its own treasurer took sick leave on the heels of McIntosh's firing which Lovshin described as due to the stressful situation it caused.

In her July 6 letter to council members, McIntosh said she enjoyed working with previous councils, the "dedicated and loyal" township staff and the citizens she served for more than two decades.

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