



Lovshin must turn things around

By **ROBERT WASHBURN**

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As controversy swirls around Hamilton Township council regarding the surprise termination of the chief administration officer, a political nightmare unfolds for Mayor Mark Lovshin.

With three and a half years left in his mandate, the question of who is in charge of this rural township north of Cobourg is very much open for debate and may hold serious consequences for the immediate and long-term future.

On April 19, Betty McIntosh was unceremoniously dismissed when Deputy Mayor Isobel Hie and Councillors Donna Cane and John Davison outflanked the mayor and Councillor Gary Woods in letting the chief administrative officer go. Since then, efforts to reinstate McIntosh have failed as the trio of rebels has toyed with procedure, dragging out any type of resolution.

The most recent incident last week was a bylaw to rescind the two previous bylaws appointing McIntosh to the position of clerk, deputy treasurer and CAO. It was the second time the council was asked to act. A debate ensued over whether the motion should be discussed in open council.

However, the mayor was left admonishing his three opponents because the simple matter of approving an agenda was stalled.

It was yet another slap in the mayor's face. Lovshin has tried to pull Hie and other into line at council, but to no avail. Last month, he even threatened to throw Hie out of the council chambers, but did not follow through. Still, it was nothing compared to the manner in which he is being treated. When council was unable to get a quorum last month because Hie, Cole and Davison said they were unable to attend, it was truly obvious Lovshin had lost control.

It would be easier for Lovshin if this were not a personnel matter, leaving the entire debate to take place in open council. Instead, the politicians are retreating into closed session as demanded by legislation. In addition, the mayor must be extremely careful what he says in public since it could compound any possible legal actions McIntosh may take in the future.

Stepping back from the emotional aspects of the incident -McIntosh was respected and loved by some members of the public, as demonstrated by the public interest, the packed gallery at meetings and letters to the editor -the predicament has crippled the mayor beyond this issue.

Now that Hie, Cole and Davison have shown how powerless the mayor can be, his credibility is certainly questionable. For now, the focus is McIntosh, but what about other issues? Will this trio decide there are other items -roads, building permits, budgets -that can be swayed by bullying the mayor into submission?

The mayor is usually the one who does the arm-twisting. When voters make their choice, the mayor's agenda is generally viewed as the roadmap for the next term. Certainly, councils can come up with strategic plans, like Cobourg did and Northumberland County council is undertaking at the moment. But when it comes to leadership, all eyes turn to the person in the big chair at the front of the chambers.

Lovshin may occupy the chair, but he has not demonstrated he wields the power associated with it. If the current pattern continues, the deputy mayor makes him look like a puppet to be manipulated. Not only will it hurt him in the next election, but also it could render him impotent in the public's eye during the current term.

Municipal council is not supposed to be overly political, save for big urban cities like Toronto, Ottawa and Mississauga. The folksy style most often associated with rural areas such as Hamilton Township is usually informal, direct and accessible based on mutual respect.

It is very clear Lovshin needs to do something because his council is poisoned. If he cannot show the political muscle to get his council in line, he may get bullied to a point where the township is beyond its current dysfunctional state and the taxpayers will suffer more than just the loss of a beloved employee. So far he has failed to step up. He may be forced to resign because he may have no choice. Let's see if he has some political savvy to get things turned around. And soon.

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