
OPINION COLUMN

Number of resolutions a councillor has drafted, or how many are in the system with reports to come back to discuss, not an issue

By Elaine Della-Mattia, Sault Star
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Ward 3 Coun. Matt Shoemaker attends a meeting at Civic Centre in August 2017.

He's racked up 107 motions in three years.

The majority of them have been supported by his colleagues around the city council table. One has to admit that's quite impressive for a rookie councillor.

More importantly, many of the resolutions are those that involve thinking outside the box, trying different ways of doing things to create efficiencies or make life a little easier for Sault Ste. Marie residents.

But last Monday, Ward 3 Coun. Matthew Shoemaker received what appeared to be scolding from a couple of his colleagues.

In the end, two of three of his motions failed.

Shoemaker says that just makes him want to work harder. In fact, he has another couple of resolutions ready to roll for council's next meeting.

Shoemaker's motion asking staff to investigate the feasibility of disabling advanced traffic signals during late night hours failed in a 4-4 vote.

He argued the motion would create more efficiency, ease the flow of traffic and prevent cars from idling at lights with no traffic. But Ward 2 Coun. Susan Myers countered that while she admired Shoemaker's initiative on many of his resolutions, and has seconded 13 of them herself, her main concern is that staff was being inundated with requests to complete the research and report. She fears that the reports may not come back to council before the term ends next fall, preventing debate and the ability of this council to see the matter to its end.

A second failed motion centred on a proposal to increase engineering user fees. Shoemaker argued the increase could stunt development and suggested the increases be revisited. Council voted against it, taking the view that the increased fees move close to cost recovery.

Shoemaker views council's rejection of the motion simply because he's penned and introduced multiple resolutions, not on the merits of the motion itself.

"Some say I'm just doing it to raise my own profile, but that's not the case," Shoemaker told The Sault Star in an interview. "I'm trying to meet the needs of the constituents and these (motions) are as a result of what I am hearing from them."

To that effect, Shoemaker argues that city council is not rejecting him, but instead the motion members of the community have suggested and want to see.

Of Shoemaker's resolutions, 90 passed and 17 failed. The majority of those that have failed dealt with affordability or making life easier for residents, Shoemaker says.

"Council has refused to debate the issue of affordability and calls these motions trivial," Shoemaker said.

Myers counters that her major concern is the volume of work that the resolutions are creating for city staff.

She wants to see the resolutions slowed down to allow staff to complete the reports and present to council.

As of Sept. 30, there are 51 outstanding council resolutions on the books that have been assigned to city staff. Three of those resolutions date back to 2012, but two are expected very soon, a third involves pending litigation.

Two outstanding resolutions from 2015 have been recently dealt with and another is expected shortly.

Another bunch of resolutions are scheduled to return to council in December at budget time and only a handful is held over until the first quarter of 2018.

Several others are also geared to the Economic Development Corp., the Art Gallery of Algoma and the public library.

By Shoemaker's calculations, 24 of his own resolutions remain on that outstanding list, some of which are expected to be dealt with at budget deliberations next month.

It must be remembered that the reports requested by council do not make up the entire job description of staff. They are part of their other duties. Some reports may require more research and legwork than others and are put in a priority sequence by senior staff.

Those that follow along the lines of council's priorities and strategic direction will likely be handled more quickly.

Resolutions that steer the city in that direction are often viewed as positive and aligning with council's main goals.

Those resolutions that don't align with council's main goals often become the debate itself and lead to some of the controversy.

While affordability may not be an exact pillar of council's strategic plan, the argument can be made that many of the resolutions can fall into council's commitment to citizens and the community, fiscal responsibility or service delivery/quality of life.

But the real bottom line is simple. All councillors put a lot of time and effort into drafting resolutions and, for the most part, the resolutions are usually designed to better the community.

Let's hope city council debates the issue itself and decides whether a motion should pass or fail based on the merit of the content, not on the number of resolutions a councillor drafted or how many are in the system with reports to come back to discuss. That will make for a stronger city council and a greater community at large.



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