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NEWS LOCAL

Agenda committee 'tightens up' on city policy

By Elaine Della-Mattia, Sault Star

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Miss submitting motions to the council agenda review deadline and you are sure to be cut off, council was told in no uncertain terms Monday.

Even the most unoffending, rubber stamping type of resolution that provides opportunity for taxpayers to hear the good things that are happening in Sault Ste. Marie will be shut down.

That's that message Mayor Christian Provenzano gave council at the end of its regularly scheduled council meeting.

“Our agenda are published in advance and show all the material we will canvas at the meeting,” Provenzano said. “To treat all councillors the same, the motion should go to agenda review it's the process and rules that govern us.”

Ward 1 Coun. Steve Butland called a point of order just as council was adjourning for the night, asking why his admittedly late motion was not read.

The motion, seconded by Ward 3 Coun. Matthew Shoemaker, requests that the CEO of Convergent Energy, Johannes Rittershausen, be invited to attend council to provide an update on his company's multi-million-dollar energy storage facility planned for Sault Ste. Marie, slated to begin operation next spring.

Provenzano told Butland the motion was penned too late and did not get the approval of the agenda review committee.

The agenda review committee is comprised of Provenzano, CAO Al Horsman and Malcolm White, deputy CAO and Clerk of Corporate Services.

The stricter guidelines imposed at the city means councillors need to have their motions into the clerk's department before noon on the Tuesday prior to the council meeting.

The agenda review committee meets Tuesday afternoons, council receives the copy of the agenda on Wednesday and the media on Friday, said White.

“I'm a bit disappointed with that. It's not a substantial (resolution). It's just an invitation to present,” Butland said.

Provenzano pressed that other councillors – Shoemaker and Myers – have attempted to add last minute resolutions to the agenda and they received the same response and their motions were read at subsequent council meetings.

White said in the past year, the council agenda policy has been “tightened up,” not only for council, but for staff reports as well.

He told The Sault Star that with the increasing need for transparency and accountability, it's important to make sure the public is well aware of the issues council will discuss, also reducing the use of an addendum.

Butland told The Sault Star that in the past, resolutions that are penned just prior to the council meeting and are not of a substantial nature with supporting documentation and reports, have always been heard under the 'new business'

portion of the agenda.

“I can certainly understand holding the resolutions if they are substantive but this was an invitation for someone to come to speak about a project that is being started here in Sault Ste. Marie,” Butland said. “I don't think anyone would take any exception to that.”

White said any pressing issues that arise after submission deadlines can be added in a pinch, or if needed, a special council meeting can be held.

The move is not designed to stifle council resolutions, White said.

“If there is a seconder to the resolution, it usually goes forward,” he said.

In some cases, the author of the motion may be asked to rework the wording of the resolution or provided with some information about an upcoming staff report on the same issue that may impact his/her decision on whether the motion should be held or not. In very rare cases, the author may be provided with advice that suggests the issue is not part of council's mandate and needs to be presented to another appropriate body, White said.

Butland believes the council chamber is the proper forum to shout out to the community about projects and initiatives that are being worked on and that there is no need to hold those types of motions.

“These are the type of things we need to get out to the community and what better place to do that than during a council meeting,” he said. “There are lots of good, positive things that are happening behind closed doors that the public doesn't know, but perhaps should know.”

Butland was successful in spreading the word about one area – aviation.

“There is a lot happening in that area but I think we're a little too quiet on the activities that are going on. That's why I want that information to get out and get the EDC to provide us with an update,” he said.

