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Mayor wants council to reexamine board process

By Elaine Della-Mattia, Sault Star

Tuesday, September 27, 2016 8:05:33 EDT PM



It's likely back to the drawing board for city council to find a better method on how to appoint citizens to boards and committees.

Mayor Christian Provenzano penned a notice of motion, read Monday, for councillors to think about over the next two weeks.

He's hoping two members of council will step up to move and second the motion which ultimately asks the city clerk's office to provide its best advice on how council should make its boards and committee appointments.

In 2015, council struck a committee to examine the city's appointment process and some councillors questioned why it was done behind closed doors.

The recommendation put forth – and approved – by council changed the policy so that the process was done in an open forum with simultaneous recorded voting.

That process, which has been used by council, allows councillors to nominate applicants to be considered for a specific board or committee. If the number of nominees exceeds the positions available, run-off voting would occur in which each member of council would print their selections on a ballot form and sign their name to the ballot. Ballots would be collected and tallied by the clerk during the open council.

meeting.

The process also adheres to the Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, ensuring only the names of the applicant are released, not their personal information.

"A few (people) didn't think the process worked so we changed it, but now we're finding the new process has some difficulties too," Provenzano told The Sault Star. "Some people are uncomfortable with their application spoken about in public and governance is important and we want to have the best people possible, with the right skills, on our boards and committees."

City council makes appointments to more than 40 boards and committees, the majority of those volunteer positions.

Some are skill-based and council must ensure that the volunteers selected have the right qualifications to serve on those boards, he said.

That issue was most recently raised with council's selection of members to the Algoma Public Health board.

In June of 2015, the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care released an assessor's report on its findings about that organization and concluded, among other things, that the boards had been complacent and members had no training.

Following that report, a governance model was used to replace the volunteer board with a skill-based board.

Provenzano said good governance on all boards is important and there are some boards that require specific skills. He said he's not sure if it's a best practice to discuss an applicant's skills in the public forum.

"We need to hear from the clerk to come back with some information on how council can best select a skill-based board or committee so we can get the best governance possible," Provenzano said. "We need to take another run at it. The process we developed, in my view, doesn't work that well."

But Ward 3 Coun. Matthew Shoemaker disagrees.

Shoemaker, who along with Ward 6 Coun. Ross Romano sat on the committee to review the appointment process, said a number of systems were examined and he believes the best process was chosen.

"I think the system works well and we have some very good boards chosen, like APH and the PUC," he said. "I'm not sure I 100% agree with the mayor's opinion."

Shoemaker said he'd support the resolution to determine if an improvement can be made.

"I'm always open to doing things better, but I think it would have to be pretty good to out do our current system," he said. "We cherry picked the best parts of the other (appointment) systems that were out there."

Shoemaker is cognizant that the existing system may not be the most efficient process, but he believes it's thorough.

"This isn't about making quick decisions, it's about making thorough decisions, and I think that is what we are doing now," he said.

City clerk Malcolm White, who served as a resource for the first committee, said council will first have to decide whether it wants to conduct more – or different – research into the appointment process.

He said that since council made its decision on the existing process, a shift has taken place in how committee members are appointed, mostly because of the APH governance reviews.

"Now we're getting that same interest in the skills based model from some members of council," White said.

While not all boards and committees require a skills-based application process, it will be up to city council to determine which ones do and whether it wants to change the appointment process to meet those needs, he said.

Council will debate the motion at its Oct. 11 regular meeting.

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