

# Millroy: Is There a Seconder on This Motion?

By **Doug Millroy** - December 29, 2020



I guess I will never understand why every now and then a city councillor can’t get a seconder for a motion he or she is proposing.

It just seems to me that if something is that important to a councillor, it should be common courtesy that it be brought up for even a brief debate.

This would at least allow the councillor to put his or her thoughts on record and in public view.

If councillors do not want to participate in a debate, they can remain silent and express their opposition when it comes to a vote.

The vote, of course, could come quickly if they refrain from entering a discussion rather than rambling on about nothing as some are wont to do.

I am into this at the moment because Ward 5 Coun. Matthew Scott was unable to get a seconder for his motion that would have allowed for the fast-tracking of a rezoning application to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing by SalDan Developments Ltd..

The fast-tracking request involved a \$70-million housing development SalDan is proposing for lands currently owned by the Sault Ste. Marie Airport Development Corp. and the ill-fated Pointe Estates development, a 91-lot waterfront subdivision Jeff and Dr. Patricia Avery wanted to build on 10 hectares of property in the Pointe aux Pins area.

It died at the hands of the Ontario Municipal Board.

I am not going to come down on one side or the other in regard to the SalDan proposal, which I have no doubt would eventually get council’s approval.

Sault Star reporter Elaine Della-Mattia said Scott told her he believes the project would be a game changer for the city and ward 5.

And well it could, if the estimates he provided that the city stood to make more than \$400,000 in permit fees and when completed would generate more than \$600,000 in taxes.

Scott is not alone in not being able to find a seconder for a motion. It happened to Ward 3 Coun. Matthew Shoemaker twice.

Back in December 2014, the newly-elected councillor presented a motion proposing that council, in a move toward openness and transparency, break with the past and make appointments to boards and commissions in open session.

He couldn’t get a seconder, not even from Mayor Christian Provenzano, whose idea it was in the first place, the mayor having suggested it in an email to councillors.

“Shame on them,” I said of the councillors in a column at the time, suggesting “It would have been only common courtesy for one of them to have seconded the motion so that it could reach the debate stage at a future meeting.”

That actually happened two months later, council voting to appoint a committee to review how other communities appoint boards and committee members.

In the meantime, council determined it would make any new appointments to boards and committees during open council meetings, the very thing it couldn’t even bring itself to discuss two months earlier.

Fast forward to March 2016 and what did we have: Shoemaker again putting forward a resolution for which he could not get a seconder.

Pointing out that over the past three years the costs for winter maintenance, parks maintenance and waste collection have increased more than \$1 million, representing a total cost to city taxpayers of over \$11 million, Shoemaker wanted to have a committee set up to review the situation.

Considering council, in going through the budget process at the time, was addressing savings as low as \$3,350 in a year, I was disappointed that it wasn’t prepared to hear Shoemaker out, at least in regard to his intent with his resolution.

After all, these were big ticket items, I thought back then. Surely they were not inviolate, that they couldn’t even be looked at.

I emailed the councillor to ask if he had tried to get a seconder before the meeting and he said he had but he did not ask all 11 of them as he could presume which ones would not support the resolution.

“None of the councillors I asked specifically were willing to second it,” he said.

In the case at hand, SalDan needed council’s support in order to approach the minister in regard to an order by the minister to allow for the rezoning of the lands, which are to be developed as a mixed-used residential subdivision with affordable housing.

Such a minister’s order, possible under recent changes in legislation, would mean SalDan could escape the time-consuming process of issuing public notices in regard to the proposed development and also holding public hearings.

Considering the hassle the Averys went through for years, with the Pointes Protection Association and its members fighting their proposed development every step of the way, it is easy to see why SalDan would want to bypass this process.

However, considering the lawyers came out as the only winners in the.Pointe Estates development debacle, it is possible the new proposed development might not face the same level of opposition.

I supported the Pointe Estates development and would certainly support this one.

However, I do believe the public, as much as I abhor the “not in my backyard” call that so often surfaces, still deserves a chance to comment on any such project.

I think this is exactly the thought that would have come out of council if it had provided Scott with a seconder for his motion.

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**Doug Millroy**

After 61 years in the news business, 41 of them associated with The Sault Star as editor, Doug continues to share his passion for writing as a columnist since retirement.