

King discusses campaign contributions

By Mark Pavilons

King councillors, sparked by a motion from Debbie Schaefer, debated the pros and cons of political campaign funding sources, at times, leading to some heated exchanges.

Ontario is proposing sweeping changes to the way political parties raise and spend money that would make Ontario's electoral financing rules among the strongest in Canada. Queen's Park introduced the Election Finances Statute Law Amendment Act, which includes a number of legislative measures that would, if passed, modernize the province's election financing rules.

Among the proposed changes are banning donations and loan guarantees by corporations and unions.

Schaefer said she simply can't see an argument for acceptance donations from entities that don't vote (corporations).

"It's important for our process to have consistent financing methods," she said, adding these proposed changes may see politicians starting fresh, from square one.

In her motion, Schaefer noted that corporations cannot vote or run for office and they don't share the same rights as citizens.

Councillor Bill Cober doesn't see it that way, and opposed Schaefer's motion. He noted King is touting itself as being investment ready and enticing businesses to locate here. It's very important that they be allowed to participate in the democratic process. If King takes such a stance, it's like asking companies to invest locally, yet telling them they can't contribute.

The current process, he argued, is transparent and accepting funds from corporations is the candidates' choice.

"I want to be a partner of business," he said.

Councillor Linda Pabst echoed those sentiments, noting there is mutual respect between herself and the corporate donors in her ward.

"Local businesses are our constituents," she pointed out.

Schaefer's motion not only supported the direction of the Province, but called for a ban on corporate and union donations. This section was removed after councillors decided it was taking things a bit too far.

Councillor Cleve Mortelliti agrees with the idea of a level playing field across the province in terms of donations, but he questioned whether King has any power to implement a ban. He's worried the Province will allow municipalities to opt out of the ban, which would create chaos. He cited the example of electing a chair in York Region, and other municipalities that allow corporate donations would have a financial advantage.

While he hasn't taken money from corporations, he doesn't feel he would be beholden to any contributor.

Mayor Steve Pellegrini said he's opposed to electing a regional chair. Campaign rules have to be fair across the province.

"I'm all for municipal election reform," he said.

Clerk Kathryn Moyle will be bringing a report back to council, examining the proposed changes to the Elections Act.

The Province is also recommending capping the amount of money third parties can spend on political advertising, and introducing strict anti-collusion measures.

The new rules will place new limits on the amount of money individuals can donate to a political party, candidate, constituency association, nomination contestant, and leadership contestant.

Creating a per-vote allowance for political parties, based on the number of votes they receive in the previous general election, is also being considered.

The Province is proposing a broad consultation process to gain feedback on the draft legislation from a wide variety of stakeholders.

"There is broad consensus that Ontario's election financing rules need to be strengthened and modernized. With these proposed reforms, our government is taking an important first step towards making Ontario a leader in election financing, with rules that are among the strongest and most transparent in the country. I look forward to the engagement of opposition parties, experts and the general public as we continue with an open and transparent process of election finance reform," said Premier Kathleen Wynne.

In order to have reforms in place by the next general election, the province is aiming to have Election Finances Statute Law Amendment Act measures take effect on Jan. 1, 2017.