

South Bruce Peninsula council critic not allowed at municipal meetings

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By Rob Gowan

The Town of South Bruce Peninsula has once again banned council critic Craig Gammie from municipal meetings.

Council passed a resolution Tuesday to ban Gammie from the town hall and all municipal meetings, including committee meetings. Gammie has also been prohibited from contacting town staff.

Coun. Janice Jackson was the only member of council to vote against the resolution, which took effect following Tuesday's meeting.

Mayor John Close said he could not provide any additional information about how council came to the decision, which was made in the form of a resolution from matters discussed in a closed session.

"I think the resolution speaks for itself and council has spoken," Close said.

It is the second time Gammie has been banned from council meetings and town hall.

South Bruce Peninsula council passed a motion at its Nov. 20, 2012, meeting prohibiting Gammie from entering town council chambers, committee meetings and town hall facilities until all litigation involving him was completed.

Council minutes from Nov. 20 say "Mr. Gammie has pending litigation against the Town of South Bruce Peninsula, was warned to not leave the tape recorder in Council Chambers yet it happened again on November 20, 2012."

But in May, Superior Court Justice Clayton Conlan temporarily lifted the ban, allowing Gammie to attend meetings under certain conditions.

In his written decision, Conlan said Gammie may attend meetings as long as he doesn't electronically record them, that he restrict himself to the council chambers, maintain decorum and not interact with staff other than the town's administrator.

Council was required to call a special meeting by the end of July to allow Gammie to make submissions why the resolution banning him should be varied or repealed, the judge's one-page endorsement said.

Council then had 30 days to respond with reasons for its decision.

Gammie said in an interview in June the arrangement was negotiated between himself and a lawyer for the municipality.

In return, Gammie abandoned his motion to quash the resolution, which he argued is illegal.

Gammie, who was at Tuesday's meeting, said Conlan convinced him to abandon the motion - which he is now regretting - "to give the good councillors in here an opportunity to get this right."

"He convinced me to consent to dismissal. That was a huge mistake," said Gammie. "What has the town done with this opportunity? They have just thrown it away."

Gammie has long been a vocal critic of council. In early 2011, police were called to the council chambers after Gammie refused to disclose if he had a recording device during a committee of the whole meeting. The town had passed a resolution banning recording devices, which was later rescinded.

Gammie publishes a blog, craiggammieblog.com. He has also brought legal proceedings against the town and several members of council.

Gammie said he anticipated council would do what it did on Tuesday.

"I am going to apply to the court so it is back on the docket. It is back in court," said Gammie. "What the town has done it is going to cost the taxpayers at least 10s of thousands of dollars, probably \$50,000, and it's on the hands of this council, it is on the bloody hands of this council, except for councillor Jackson who voted against it."

Council's motion Tuesday banned Gammie from entering the town's council chambers and town hall and banned him from attending council meetings, committee meetings, police services board meetings, Wiarton Business Improvement Area board of management meetings, Wiarton-Keppel International Airport board meetings and any public meetings held by the town.

He was also prohibited with communicating with any of the town's staff except for administrator Jacqueline Farrow-Lawrence.

The resolution also stipulates that should Gammie decide to run in the municipal election next year, he would be able to contact the town clerk by mail or e-mail only about election matters and he would be permitted in the clerk's office on the permission of the clerk and if the administrator or another staff member is present.

Jackson said she voted against the resolution for democratic reasons.

"Putting aside the issues with Mr. Gammie, I am talking about banning someone from a public meeting when we are going to be discussing what we are going to be doing with his tax dollars and I don't agree with it," said Jackson. "It could be anybody. I am putting names and personalities aside and it is just a matter of democracy for me. It is as simple as that."

Jackson said the matter was discussed in closed session, so she couldn't say much more about how the resolution came about.

"It was a very labourious issue, I can tell you," she said. "Council really did labour over it, but I am firm on my beliefs that it is really just a matter of democracy."