

Council looking at reinstating recording ban

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By Rob Gowan

South Bruce Peninsula council is again contemplating banning the public from recording its meetings.

On Tuesday council deferred the third and final reading of a bylaw on the rules of order and procedure of council and directed staff to report back on adding a section that would ban the recording council meetings by members of the public.

Coun. Jay Kirkland, who was the first to suggest the ban during Tuesday's meeting, said anyone can listen to recordings of the meeting on the town's website for two weeks following a meeting.

"If somebody records a meeting and they come back to me a year from now and say 'You said this,' I can't remember what I said a year ago," said Kirkland. "How do I know they don't alter those recordings so I have to go back and revert back to our minutes that were wrote down."

Kirkland said under the proposed change the public would still be allowed to listen to the town's recordings on its website and members of the press would still be allowed to record during meetings.

"They do have the ability to listen to it on the Internet where we keep it for a two-week period," said Kirkland. "We as a municipality do not keep those recordings on file, but if they want to listen to that they can. I am not trying to keep the public from listening to the meetings, I just don't want to have recording in the town hall."

Coun. Jim Turner agreed with Kirkland that the town and accredited members of the media should be the only ones recording council sessions. He said meeting minutes are the official records of meetings. "The records of our meetings for all purposes should be the ones taken by our clerk in accordance with the Municipal Act," Turner said.

South Bruce Peninsula instituted a ban on people recording open sessions of council in March 2011. Weeks later the town rescinded the ban.

Since then the town has made recordings of council meetings, which are then posted on its website for two weeks.

The first move to ban recording devices came after council critic Craig Gammie taped a closed portion of a committee of the whole meeting on March 7, 2011. Gammie said at the time he had inadvertently left his recording device on during the in camera session and informed council of what he called "an accident" as soon as the council chamber was opened again to the public.

In late 2012 Gammie was banned from the council chambers.

In the minutes from the Nov. 20, 2012 council meeting it stated, "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."

In May, Superior Court Justice Clayton Conlan temporarily lifted the ban on Gammie attending meetings, but council again banned him at a meeting on Aug. 20.

Kirkland declined to say if his decision to revisit the ban had anything to do with past instances in the council chambers involving recording devices.