

CAO meeting with councillors to explain how he didn't know about 'rogue' Charleswood route

By: [Aldo Santin](#)

Posted: 12/18/2017 10:50 AM | Last Modified: 12/18/2017 6:44 PM

Two very different images of the dynamic between elected officials and the public service emerged from city hall Monday after a closed-door briefing for councillors from the embattled chief administrative officer.

CAO Doug McNeil told reporters he had a "great" meeting with councillors who were questioning his role in south Charleswood corridor project.

Mayor Brian Bowman told reporters he learned nothing new from the private meeting – though he didn't ask any questions – and he was satisfied with the answers McNeil provided to councillors.

But several councillors remain critical of McNeil's actions: one wants him to issue a written public apology to staff; another is questioning whether his actions breached professional engineering ethics; and, a third seemed incredulous that McNeil and the ward councillor said they had been repeatedly kept in the dark by staff in the public works department.

"The information session today was great," McNeil said as he left the hour-long briefing to councillors. "I was able to go back through all the timeline on this project and answer a lot of detailed questions."

But for Counc. Russ Wyatt, Jeff Browaty and Janice Lukes, they left the meeting shaking their heads at what they had been told.

"For me, there are still questions unanswered," said Lukes, adding she believes McNeil wrongly blamed engineering staff when the information had been provided to him.

Lukes said McNeil's failure to thoroughly read confidential briefing notes and then blame staff for keeping him in the dark is a breach of the Code of Ethics of the Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of the Province of Manitoba.

"I suggested (McNeil) issue a written public apology to the department of public works and to the engineering division for the fact he threw them under the bus even though the information was clearly in the file," Wyatt said. "We've all had to eat crow. I've eaten crow many times; I don't like the taste of it but you know what, you make a mistake, you stand up and say 'I made a mistake' and apologize.

"I think it's absolutely crucial. He needs to stand up and give a written apology to the engineering division, to the public works department."

Councillors met with McNeil to understand how he and Coun. Marty Morantz claimed not to have known that the engineering department had developed the controversial "rogue" corridor route through south Charleswood when emails suggested both men had been kept apprised of developments in the project.

McNeil called the meeting after councillors raised questions following media reports last week about the existence of emails that reveal engineering staff had determined the optimal route – a southwest extension of Sterling Lyon Parkway – but one that had never been shown to area residents before.

McNeil and Morantz had publicly criticized department staff for failing to inform them and the residents about the decision to choose the Sterling Lyon Parkway extension – dubbed the "rogue route"

The emails reveal that engineering staff had developed a "close out" plan that involved contacting the affected property owners and preparing documents for council's consideration.

The emails also reveal that engineering staff said they had kept Morantz – who is the ward councillor and chairman of the public works committee – informed of the project's process but, like McNeil, Morantz claimed not to have been specifically told about the Sterling Lyon Parkway option.

At least five senior public works staff, including two former directors, who were involved in the project are no longer employed at city hall, with two of them quitting recently – allegedly because of the public criticism from McNeil and Morantz.

McNeil told the *Free Press* last week that despite the existence of the emails, some of which included attachments of detailed drawings of the corridor route and the locations of the properties the city needed to acquire, he was never told that a route had been chosen and insisted that he never opened the attachments.

Browaty said no information was released at the information session that contradicted the positions taken by McNeil and Morantz.

"I have to take (McNeil and Morantz) at their word at this point," Browaty said. "I've seen nothing to indicate otherwise. I would love to have conversation with some of those former employees that were in on those discussions."

Bowman said he supports Morantz' plan to have the city auditor conduct an internal review of all the decisions taken on the project – a move that Lukes said would now be a waste of time.

"What is the audit going to tell us," Lukes said. "People who know answers have left and they're not going to speak because the firms they're working for (now) are hired by the city. We just have Doug to audit and Marty....everyone else has left."

Wyatt said that McNeil's failure to publicly admit his mistakes and apologize to staff will likely influence a job performance review that's expected to occur sometime in 2018.

Bowman appointed Wyatt to a new sub-committee, along with Morantz and Couns. Cindy Gilroy and Matt Allard, that will be tasked to review the job performance of the city's four statutory employees — the CAO, the Chief Financial Officer, the City Clerk and the City Auditor.

aldo.santin@freepress.mb.ca

Mayor supports audit idea

Mayor Brian Bowman is supporting city hall's CAO but Bowman now wants to know if Coun. Janice Lukes had any involvement with the "rogue" Sterling Lyon Parkway route.

Bowman said he will support the proposal from Coun. Marty Morantz to have the city auditor conduct an audit into how decisions were made on the project and he said Lukes should be a focus of the audit.

"It's no secret (Lukes) has relationships with certain developers," Bowman said. "I'd like to know if there was dialogue about this rogue route. It's something the internal auditor can take a look at. The internal auditor can take a look at a number of communications, past, current chairs and members of council and me."

Bowman had appointed Lukes as chairwoman of the public works committee immediately after the 2014 election. It was at the committee's first meeting in December 2015 when the corridor project was expanded and its budget doubled in size from \$800,000 to \$1.6 million.

Bowman said he has no evidence that Lukes had done anything wrong but said he believes what he calls her "relationship with certain developers" needs to be explored.

Lukes said she was shocked by Bowman's allegation, adding he targeted her because she's asking questions about Bowman's involvement in the project.

"He said what...wow," Lukes said when told of Bowman's statement. "That's astounding."

Lukes said she had no input into the staff's decision to choose the Sterling Lyon Parkway extension, adding she's been in contact with developers because Waverley West, the city's fastest growing neighbourhood, is in her ward.

"I've got relationships with developers, builders, snow removal folks, contractors," Lukes said.

Bowman said he took no interest in the project until area residents complained in October and insisted he also was unaware of the corridor route chosen by engineering staff.

Bowman denied that any members of his family were impacted by the project and denied any suggestion that he had intervened on their behalf at any point in the past three years.

— Aldo Santin