

Morantz's motion for review of corridor project called a 'whitewash'

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Coun. Marty Morantz's pledge for an internal review to get to the bottom of the south Charleswood corridor project has fallen short of expectations.

Morantz (Charleswood-Tuxedo-Whyte Ridge) told reporters Jan. 9 he wanted the Winnipeg city auditor to investigate how the corridor project unfolded and why the public was not informed about the unpopular change in the route until the fall.

But another councillor and area resident said she doesn't believe the motion Morantz brought to executive policy committee (EPC) Wednesday will shed any more light on who knew what, and when, about the controversial project.

"The motion is a whitewash to bury the facts," said Coun. Janice Lukes (South Winnipeg-St. Norbert). "It's an election year, and I believe if real transparency and truth were revealed on this file it would end multiple political careers."

Morantz's motion, which was unanimously adopted by EPC, calls for the office of the city auditor to merely to review city hall's internal reporting processes and whether it was adequate in relaying important information.

The Morantz motion directs the city auditor to "conduct an audit of the effectiveness of the current systems and processes in place to support city staff and council for identifying and communicating relevant and material information to decision makers through the City of Winnipeg report process; giving specific attention to the adherence of such current systems and processes by individuals in relation to the Sterling Lyon/William Clement Parkway study."

Mayor Brian Bowman and City of Winnipeg chief administrative officer (CAO) Doug McNeil rebuffed repeated calls for a special meeting of council to review McNeil's handling of the project, saying they expected Morantz's motion would result in the proper avenue to determine how the project unfolded.

Area resident David Ames, president of the South Wilkes Community Association and one of the property owners who was going to be impacted by the proposed Sterling Lyon Parkway extension, said he was disappointed Morantz failed to call for an inquiry as promised.

Ames said several news reports have disclosed emails from city staff were familiar with the project and they all stated Morantz and McNeil had been informed about the project as it developed.

"Marty Morantz assured our group he was going to call an inquiry, but now they're not going to look into any of this because it won't exonerate any of them," Ames said. "It's clear they don't want an investigation during an election year."

On Wednesday, Morantz defended his motion and the vagueness of the wording.

"It is drafted broadly to catch 'systems and processes,'" he said, adding he expects the city auditor to use the exchange of emails between staff on the project to test the accuracy of information.

Ames said he believes Morantz was pressured to drop a call for an inquiry, in favour of the motion he presented to EPC.

Lukes blamed Bowman for Morantz's decision to weaken his motion.

"Clearly there is no desire on behalf of the mayor to seek accountability on who knew what, when," she said.

Morantz disagreed with the critics, insisting his motion "is entirely appropriate."

McNeil and Morantz have insisted city staff had withheld key information from them as the south Winnipeg roadway expansion project was developing, specifically failing to inform them staff had developed a new route that had not been presented to the public.

McNeil insisted he would be vindicated by the findings of the audit.

When explaining to reporters Jan. 9 why he would ask the city auditor to investigate, Morantz said questions needed to be asked to determine why information was withheld from him and McNeil.

"I think there are a number of things that went wrong," Morantz said at the time. "That is the reason why I want to have our auditor examine this file. I don't have all the answers.

"My main concern is why wasn't there was a big red flag put up with this road? Why didn't someone say to the CAO or to me, 'By the way, we've changed this route.' It's a very reasonable question to ask: why didn't that communication take place?"

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