

Councillors want 'full, detailed report' from planning department probe made public

By: Ryan Thorpe Posted April 10, 2019

Three Winnipeg city councillors want the results of the ongoing investigation into allegations of widespread workplace misconduct in the planning, property and development department made public in a "full and detailed report."

During Monday's meeting of the Assiniboia Community Committee, Coun. Janice Lukes (Waverly West) spearheaded a motion to force Chief Administrative Officer Doug McNeil to provide council with the findings of the probe — sparked by a recent *Free Press* report — within 30 days of its closure.



Surveillance footage of City of Winnipeg Planning, Property and Development Department employee at Value Village.

"If all or some of the allegations prove to be true, the resulting disciplinary actions will become the responsibility of the (human resources) department to address and they won't become public," Lukes said.

"I'm sure you have lots of citizens calling. I think it's our responsibility, of course, for council to provide oversight and stewardship and ensure the citizens have confidence their tax dollars are being utilized in the most efficient manner possible."

Lukes went on to float the possibility of directing the public service to conduct a "corporate culture audit" within the department, although that was ultimately not included in the final version of the motion.

The motion was unanimously approved by the committee, which also includes councillors Scott Gillingham (St. James-Brooklands-Weston) and Kevin Klein (Charleswood-Tuxedo-Westwood). The motion now goes to the mayor's executive policy committee for a second vote.

On Wednesday, a city spokesman said the public service will await direction from council before determining how to proceed on the request. He also said the city's investigation into the planning, property and development department is proceeding with "the support of the union" and is expected to conclude "within the coming weeks."

Winnipeg's Chief Corporate Service Officer Michael Jack has said disciplinary actions — up to and including termination — are on the table, pending the outcome of the city's internal investigation.

The city launched the probe last Friday after publication of a *Free Press* report outlining accusations of workplace misconduct by more than a dozen inspectors with the department, who were placed under surveillance by a local private investigations firm.

Their findings were documented in video, photos and notes that were shared with the *Free Press* for review. It's alleged the inspectors appeared to be putting in, on average, three hours of work each day.

Investigators' observations of some city inspectors included: lengthy group coffee breaks at Tim Hortons; long lunches at greasy spoons, Bar Italia and Hooters; shopping at Costco, Salvation Army thrift stores and other businesses; and taking care of chores such as clearing their driveway of snow or working on a personal rental property.

Wilson Investigations was hired to carry out the surveillance by a group of more than a dozen Winnipeggers — homeowners, business owners and construction contractors — who've had negative experiences in their dealings with the department, ranging from alleged long wait times for inspections to poor, unprofessional treatment at the hands of staff.

The group spent \$18,000 to hire the investigation firm.

In a letter sent to the *Free Press*, the group said it is open to releasing the full, unedited investigation report if the city agrees to hold an independent inquiry into the allegations.

The *Free Press* sent the letter on to the city Wednesday, as the group requested. However, it appears that because it wasn't sent directly by the group, the city wouldn't comment on the possibility of an independent inquiry.

"To date, the city has not received a letter from the group... the City of Winnipeg has made efforts to talk to these individuals directly and will not be communicating with them via the media," a city spokesman said in a written statement.

"We continue to encourage the owners of the information to release the information to the City of Winnipeg to assist in the investigation."

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