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## Mississauga melee nears nadir



Mississauga Councillor Carolyn Parrish, left, fears that if Mayor Hazel McCallion, right, can delay a conflict inquiry beyond a fall election, a new Mayor-friendly council could kill it. Peter J. Thompson, National Post

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Megan O'Toole, National Post · Saturday, Jul. 17, 2010

For months, Mississauga councillors have been divided over the city's judicial inquiry -- seven support the process, while the remaining four call it an unjustified attack on the city's long-serving Mayor.

Councillor Carolyn Parrish believes those battle lines are moving into the fall election, and this week accused Hazel McCallion of backing a slate of candidates to replace most, if not all, of the seven who voted to challenge the Mayor's iron grip.

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"She's been conscripting candidates against all of us," said Ms. Parrish, who joined council four years ago after more than a decade in federal politics. The goal, she suggested, is to "knock off one or two and return the balance of power to where it belongs, in their opinion, which is in the Mayor's hands."

Meanwhile, Ms. McCallion -- whose mayoral reign extends back more than 30 years -- is facing a new threat from the seven "rebel" councillors, who have pooled funds to hire a lawyer as they quietly mull legal action against the Mayor, the National Post has learned.

The councillors are alleging a direct violation of the Municipal Conflict of Interest Act, dating back three years, when the Mayor introduced a motion that would have saved her son's development company \$11-million.

Ms. Parrish denies any desire to disparage the Mayor, who is already up to her neck in allegations of conflict.

"I'm not into devastation and I'm not into burning the earth or anything else," she said, noting councillors will likely shelve the legal action if the inquiry--which is set to examine all the alleged conflicts involving Ms. McCallion --moves forward expeditiously.

But the Mayor's legal team has already stalled the process once, and Ms. Parrish is worried if they push it beyond the fall election, a new Mayor-friendly council majority could vote to kill the inquiry.

All of which has Councillor Pat Saito, one of the Mayor's four closest allies, shaking her head and lamenting the impact of "political gaming" on Mississauga's reputation.

"I don't know when this is going to end.... It's hurting the city big time," Ms. Saito said. "We're becoming a joke, nationally."

Councillor Maja Prentice, who is retiring this year, decries the \$5-million inquiry as an enormous waste of tax dollars, and scoffs at the concept of Ms. McCallion endorsing an anti-inquiry slate; in more than two decades in office, she cannot recall the Mayor ever encouraging a specific candidate to run.

Ms. Parrish names five pro-inquiry councillors and their pro-McCallion challengers:

-In her own ward, Ms. Parrish points to former Mississauga councillor Ron Starr, the Mayor's long-time friend and supporter.

-Councillor Sue McFadden faces Patrick Mendes, who organized a rally in support of Ms. McCallion last year.

-Councillor George Carlson is squaring off against Luz Del Rosario, a school trustee who vows to "promote harmony" in council.

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-Councillor Nando Iannicca has an opponent in Mississauga Youth Games founder Louroz Mercader -- who boasts the Mayor "expressed her full support for me."

-Councillor Carmen Corbasson faces political activist Jim Tovey, who promises to bring "old school" civility back to council, though he says he would be surprised if the Mayor endorsed him, considering he opposed her plan for the Lakeview power plant.

Ms. McCallion did not respond to questions on whether she endorsed any candidates for office.

Tom Urbaniak, a Cape Breton University professor with expertise on the McCallion mayoralty, said the Mayor would likely

be making "high-level strategic interventions" in the municipal election.

"These interventions will be subtle, focusing on the need for stability, along with critiques of certain incumbents, especially Councillor Parrish," Prof. Urbaniak said. "[S]he does not have a street-level organization, and her popularity, which remains formidable, is not easily transferable to other candidates."

The inquiry is slated to run at least until late August, with the election campaign to formally kick off in September. The commissioner will examine a number of allegedly suspect city business deals, including the potential conflicts of interest involving Ms. McCallion and her son, Peter Mc-Callion, who was affiliated with a company called World Class Developments.

Now, Mississauga Council has voted to authorize up to \$5,000 per councillor for legal advice related to the inquiry, and those funds can be pooled. The seven dissident councillors, using this money, have hired lawyer Stephen D'Agostino to work on their behalf.

Now Mr. D'Agostino has uncovered documents that, according to Ms. Parrish, fall under the scope of provincial legislation. These documents pertain to a motion Ms. McCallion moved three years ago, asking for a delay in implementing new development charges. That motion would have saved Peter McCallion \$11-million on a hotel and conference centre his company wanted to build in the city centre, Ms. Parrish said.

The savings were never realized and the hotel deal ultimately fell apart; however, the delay in hiking development charges may have cost the region nearly \$45-million.

"I'm absolutely convinced there was a conflict of interest there... If they stall the inquiry until the end of September, then it [may] never get discussed," Ms. Parrish said.

Freya Kristjanson, one of Ms. McCallion's lawyers, disputes any



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conflict with the 2007 motion, passed by Peel Regional Council.

"This was a bylaw of general application. It was not targeted at World Class Developments. It affected all development in Brampton, Caledon and Mississauga," Ms. Kristjanson said. "So it certainly was not targeted at WCD and that would be a most unfair targeting were that not made clear."

Ms. Saito dismissed as "appalling" the move to hire another lawyer on the backs of taxpayers.

"If they're not going to trust what the inquiry is doing, then they're admitting they've wasted \$5-million of taxpayers' money on nothing," Ms. Saito said. Ms. Mc-Callion has repeatedly declined to answer any questions related to the inquiry.

Ms. Parrish says the councillors' decision on how to proceed will hinge largely on the swiftness of the inquiry; the Mayor's legal team recently stalled proceedings by asking the commissioner to limit the definition of "conflict of interest." That request was denied, and lawyer Elizabeth McIntyre says there are no plans to appeal.

Since discovering the latest conflict allegation, councillors have a six-week window in which to launch legal action.

While the Mayor's supporters believe this is all part of a larger strategy to discredit Ms. McCallion and ultimately unseat a titan, Ms. Parrish maintains it is a battle for justice.

"We have put our heart and soul into this thing, the seven of us. We've pushed hard," she said, noting the paramount goal is to urge a revamp of toothless conflict-of-interest rules.

"That was our objective," she said. "We weren't after anybody."

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