

Anti-KED group alleges city continues to hide information

STAR STAFF

The lawyer for an anti-Kingsway Entertainment District group is alleging the city continues to display a pattern of non-disclosure when it comes to the controversial project.

Eric Gillespie said that was shown again at the Nov. 3 meeting of city council by “the reluctance” of Ian Wood, the senior City of Greater Sudbury executive responsible for the project, “to provide a yes or no answer and assurances that signed and committed build agreements for the casino and hotel elements of the KED were in place.”

The Minnow Lake Restoration Group has hired Gillespie in its fight to block the KED. The group has filed an application in court, seeking a judicial review “with respect to ‘failing to disclose relevant and material information’ at the special council meeting on June 16, 2021, held to evaluate the Kingsway Entertainment District and downtown.”

The KED is schedule to open in 2024 and will contain a new \$100-million arena/events centre city taxpayers will pay for, a \$60-million casino that Gateway Casinos will construct, a hotel and other facilities.

During last week’s council meeting, Ward 3 Coun. Gerry Montpelier questioned Wood, executive director of strategic initiatives, communications and citizen services, about who will be the hotel operator at the KED. He also wanted to know what kinds of agreements are in place.

“Yes or no, do you have a le-

gal, ready-to-build agreement?” Montpelier said to Wood during the Nov. 3 meeting. “Not seed money ... That’s not what I’m asking you. I’m asking, do you have in your hand a build commitment? Yes or no?”

After several minutes, Wood admitted he did not have anything written that had not been shared with council.

“The commitments of all the parties are available to council in the signed agreements. Beyond that, we do not have anything else,” he responded. “What you have is what we have.”

Later during last week’s meeting, Ward 11 Coun. Bill Leduc told his colleagues he knows who the hotel developer is, but has been sworn to secrecy - comments that also caught the attention of the group.

The restoration group said it wonders when Leduc learned what he alleged and from whom, and they want to know “how this inside knowledge may have affected his vote(s) on the KED/downtown. This resulted in Ward 10 Coun. Fern Cormier asking staff to investigate, after commenting that it was most improper for any councillor to withhold sharing of such information from council.”

The restoration group is alleging the identification and commitment of the project partners were withheld from council before their meeting in June. They also say several critical pieces of information were overlooked, including “an economic impact assessment; an evaluation of the development in

relation to the Community Energy and Emissions Plan; participation of other levels of government; transportation issues; public input; and a comprehensive comparison of alternatives, including projectNOW,” which proposes the city refurbish the Sudbury Arena rather than build a new one.

The Minnow Lake group argues the reticence of staff to disclose information goes beyond last week’s meeting.

“There is further evidence of systemic reluctance on the part of ... senior executive to answer councillors’ questions at other meetings, including July 14, 2021.

“Ward 2 Coun. Michael Vagnini asked Mr. Wood four times about the existence of letters of intent to build. Each time Mr. Wood avoided answering the question and the exchange was terminated by Mayor Brian Biggar, a common occurrence,” the group alleges.

“It was only after direct questioning by Coun. Montpelier on Nov. 3, was the truth revealed that there were no such letters and no signed commitment to build.”

Gillespie is recommending the city stop work on the KED - site preparations, including grading and blasting, are set to begin by Nov. 29 - and agree to hold additional public input meetings.

The Minnow Lake Restoration Group has made its divisional court application available. At nearly 400 pages, it is a hefty document, but contains affidavits, supporting evidence and transcripts. dmacdonald@postmedia.ca
Twitter: @SudburyStar