

HAMILTON'S SECRECY HURTS TRUST IN GOVERNMENT

It is getting more difficult to trust what officials from the City of Hamilton say or more importantly don't say to the public.

After revelations earlier this year that city staff had buried a critical consultant's report on the Red Hill Creek Parkway for almost six years, it was revealed by the city - under pressure from a Hamilton Spectator story - that 24 billion litres of sewage and stormwater runoff spilled into Chedoke Creek over four years.

The leak was reported and known by staff at least since July 2018 and fixed not long after. However, in January 2019, councillors behind closed doors ultimately decided the report should remain private after the legal advice stated the public disclosure could harm the city's ability to defend itself from major fines.

It is even more damning to councillors and staff alike that while they were debating informing the public about the spill, they were also wrestling with how the Red Hill Parkway report was being kept away from the public's scrutiny.

A city news release last week stated that stormwater and untreated sewage had spilled through a bypass gate that had been left open by about five per cent since January 2014. It was the first time the public had heard about the spill since the waste was discovered floating in Cootes Paradise in July 2018. The city says it doesn't know why the gate was left open.

As well, the city didn't notify the provincial Environment Ministry about any issues with the discharge until July 2018.

The province issued an order to the city on Aug. 2, 2018, forcing it to identify the amount of sewage that was discharged and what was in the sewage, along with an evaluation of the impacts to the creek and the need for remediation. The ministry is now investigating.

The city says it has taken several actions including retaining an external consultant to review the environmental impacts of the leak and to make recommendations about how to clean up the creek.

That isn't good enough by a long shot.

The city should start by apologizing - yet again - to the citizens of Hamilton for its incompetence, but more importantly, trying to hide the fact someone tried to cover up the problem.

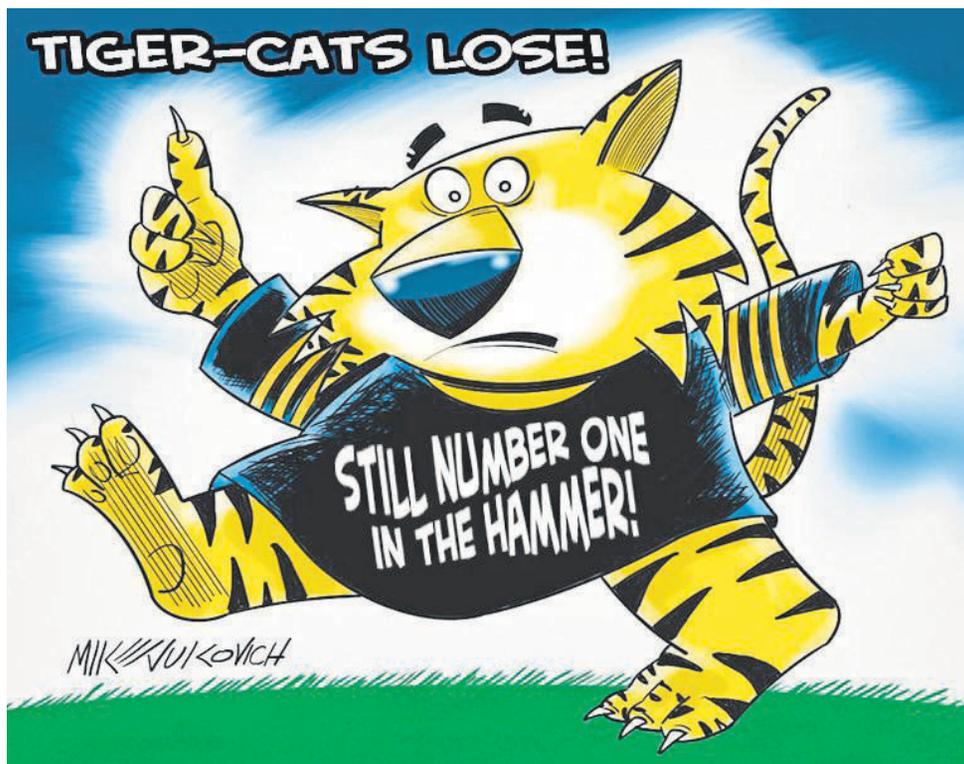
Hamilton council, under pressure from the public, finally did the right thing and approved the creation of the Red Hill Parkway judicial inquiry and apologized to the public for hiding a key piece of evidence that could have improved the parkway sooner.

Now the city is faced with a similar blunder that only enhances the lack of trust the city has with the community. While the environmental impact to Chedoke Creek and Cootes Paradise is terrible, the attempt to hide the fact the city messed up again is a slap to the face of Hamilton's hard-working taxpayers.

There needs to be a full and complete investigation overseen by new city manager Janette Smith, as to why the gate was left open. But also why city officials and councillors decided to prevent the information from being released to the community, despite advice from lawyers to keep the problem secret.

Only then can the healing begin and, if possible, trust restored to a severely compromised city leadership.

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PRIDE IN OUR GREAT YOUTH

COLUMNIST GORDON CAMERON IS LOOKING FOR OUR BEST



GORDON CAMERON
Column

Is it wrong to take pride in the accomplishments of others? If so, then I've been very wrong for a very long time.

For the last 14 years, I've been privileged to be involved with the Ontario Community Newspapers Association's Junior Citizen of the Year Awards as an organizer, presenter and speaker, and have had the chance to meet more than 150 of the best youth our province has to offer.

Hamilton Community News and our fellow members of the association search the province every year for 12 outstanding youth between the ages of six and 17 years old who engage in worthwhile community service, have performed acts of heroism or

bravery in the past year, contribute to their community while living with a physical or psychological limitation, exhibit excellence in their personal achievements or who are "good kids" who show a commitment to make life better for others and do more than is normally expected of someone their age.

So now you understand why I'm as proud as I am of all our past recipients.

I'm also quite proud of the fact that since coming to work at Metroland in 2013, we've had seven Ontario Junior Citizen of the Year recipients from our area.

For the second year in a row, we had two local honourees: Chyler Sewell from the Mountain and Andrew Poirier from York. Chyler was recognized for her work at Neighbour to Neighbour and with Westmount's Eco Ninja team. Andrew raised over \$8,000 to help pay for therapy dogs for veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder by building and selling birdhouses with his brother.

Great work, by truly

great young people.

If you know of a young person who you believe should be recognized as an Ontario Junior Citizen, nominations are now open. Information and nomination packages are available online at www.ocna.org/juniorcitizen. Nominations close on Dec. 13 so you still have some time to get everything together. Recipients will be announced in early 2020, with a gala reception and ceremony to be held in Toronto in the spring.

I'm proud that every week we get to share with our readers some of the many great things our kids are doing to better their community and our world. Let's broadcast their good works throughout the province and who knows, perhaps inspire their peers to see that age isn't a barrier when it comes to doing amazing things.

If nothing else, their stories will continue to bring great pride and joy to a certain newspaper columnist with a soft spot for inspirational youth.

Gordon Cameron is group managing editor for Hamilton Community News.

ABOUT US

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