

Emotions run high as group returns to council for answers on ‘neutrality’ bylaw

By Georgia York

MINTO – A delegation returned to town council on Tuesday, as proponents of a petition pushed for answers regarding a requested “neutrality” bylaw.

Jim Dopfer, one of the organizers of the controversial petition, had asked council for “neutral” public spaces, including banners, flags and crosswalks. Dopfer told council he felt “attacked” by two people who spoke during a previous public question period on May 7.

At that meeting, Jokelee Vanderkop called the petition “a deceitful cover for hate and discrimination” against the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, and Caitlin Hall, a founding member of the Minto Pride committee, told council petition signatures were gained in an “unethical” way.

Dopfer said at the May 21 meeting he expected that Mayor Dave Turton and council would stop such “hate speech” but they did not. He stressed the petition has nothing to do with the town’s proposed banner policy, but everything to do with the community becoming divided.

“I challenge anybody on council to find a hateful word in my (May 7) speech,” Dopfer said. He later added, “Government at any level should not be involved

in personal choice matters of its electorate.

“You are forcing your beliefs and your values ... onto everyone.

“Council, don’t you believe that 900 people deserve an informed response from elected representatives?”

Asked by councillor Judy Dirksen what petition organizers deemed public spaces, Dopfer replied “all spaces taxpayers pay for.”

Councillor Ron Elliott said he is concerned about the repercussions of a bylaw requiring “neutral” public spaces. He mentioned the Palmerston Lions Club wants to display banners recognizing past influential members, but that would not be possible if “political, social and religious movements” are removed from public spaces, as petition organizers are requesting.

Elliott added the Christmas decorations the town puts up every year would also not be permitted. He said he can’t see the “neutral” spaces concept working without taking everything away.

Deputy mayor Jean Anderson spoke passionately in support of Pride banners.

“It includes everybody ... this is about inclusivity and acceptance ...” she said. “You can’t say ‘we recognize this group and we respect

them. They can put up banners and they can have fundraisers, but this group that we don’t like, they can not.’ Shame on you.”

Anderson too, listed groups that could not longer be recognized under a “neutral” spaces bylaw, including volunteers, first responders and health care workers.

When it came for the public question period, 10 people spoke in favour of the petition. Tom McDonald asked why the municipality would “display sexual messages to the general public,” suggesting everyone’s “sexual preferences” should “stay in the privacy of our own home and not be displayed on our main street and on our lamp posts.”

Turton assured Dopfer and other petition organizers he is taking the issue seriously and has lost sleep as a result. He told council a resolution on the matter will likely return to council on June 18.

In a statement issued after the May 21 meeting, Minto Pride Committee offi-

cials said those who spoke during the question period showed their “true colours” but council handled the situation with grace.

“The presenters may insist this has nothing to do with hate and is instead about inclusion and neutrality, but when questioned by council if this means groups like the Lions can’t have displays ... they couldn’t answer that,” the Pride committee noted. The statement continued, “It’s not about neutrality, it’s about their discomfort with diversity, equity and inclusion, specifically Pride.”

The Pride committee urged people to contact them for the opportunity to educate themselves about “harmful misconceptions”.

Fire destroys chicken coop in Erin

Determined cause was a heat lamp

By Advertiser staff

ERIN – A heat lamp was determined to be the cause of a fire that destroyed a chicken coop in Erin on May 11.

Erin fire chief Jim Sawkins said the initial call came in just before 5pm, with a person on the Wellington Road 124 property reporting a large shed on fire.

The “shed” turned out to be a chicken coop, and it was lost in the blaze, Sawkins said.

Both Erin and Rockwood fire departments responded to the fire, with a total of nine vehicles on site, he said, noting the reason for the large response was concern about the proximity of

the shed to a house on site.

The fire, however, did not spread to the house.

“We were lucky there,” said Sawkins.

He could not say whether any chickens were harmed in the fire.

Another call

Crews from Rockwood were back out again later the same night at around 9pm for a cooking fire investigation at a local seniors’ residence in the village.

Guelph-Eramosa Fire Chief Jim Petrik described the situation at 160 Guelph St. not as a fire, but as a minor “cooking incident.” But he confirmed firefighters did attend.

“We just went and blew all the smoke out of the hallways,” he said.

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