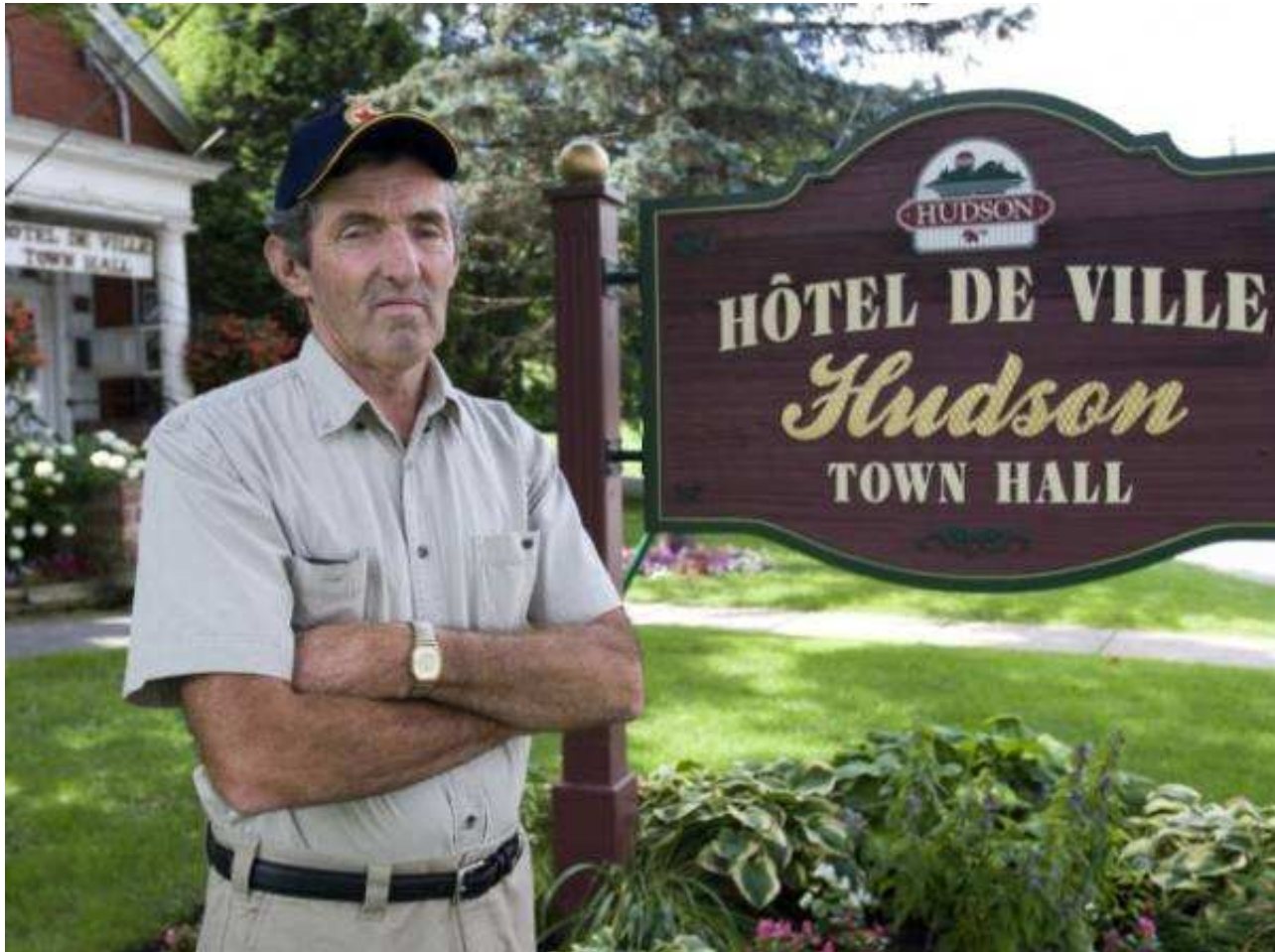


Mayor of Hudson resigns

BY JASON MAGDER, THE GAZETTE JUNE 20, 2013 5:48 AM



Hudson Mayor Michael Elliott confirmed to The Gazette he has submitted his resignation to council.

Photograph by: File photo, The Gazette

Another town locked in scandal, and another mayor resigning.

This time, however, Hudson Mayor Michael Elliott said running a town under investigation for fraud was too much stress for him to handle. He submitted his resignation to council on Tuesday morning, effective immediately.

“I had open-heart surgery last year, and the kind of stress the council has been under in the last three or four months has been a little over the top,” Elliott said. “The staff was demoralized, and it was getting difficult to move projects ahead.

“The main thing is my health,” he said. “I am going to take more time for myself and my family.”

Elliott, 72, called in the Sûreté du Québec last month after the town of 5,000 west of Montreal conducted an audit of its past affairs, and found some funds had gone missing. The audit was ordered in March after administrative errors were found in a salary deduction at source of the town’s 36 municipal employees. The SQ opened an investigation into possible fraud.

“The council received information indicating that sums of money had been misappropriated,” Elliott said in a statement last month. “It is not known at this time what the scope of the alleged fraud, or the amount of funds that may have been misappropriated, might be.”

The town also recently discovered 315 residents had not paid taxes, some for several years dating back to 2005. The town is owed a total of \$1.2 million.

Town councillor Robert Spencer said because there is a police investigation underway, councillors have declined to comment about the announcement, but councillor Louis Thifault did speak to *The Gazette*, and said he was saddened to hear the news.

“He certainly had personal reasons, and I respect his decision,” Thifault said. “It’s regrettable that he felt obliged to resign.”

He added he doesn’t think Elliott was involved in fraud, pointing out that he was the one that called in the SQ when irregularities were found.

Hudson residents expressed surprise Wednesday at hearing the news their mayor had resigned.

Leslie Blake-Côté said without passing judgment on the mayor, she’s generally disappointed to hear about corruption at all political levels.

“When you look at what’s happening in the political arena, it’s discouraging for people who try to live their lives as honestly as possible that not everyone has the same ethical background.”

Liane Ashford, a resident of nearby Hudson Acres, said with all the money gone missing, less is available to improve the town’s services.

“The infrastructure is already impacted,” she said. “Main Road isn’t what it used to be. Hudson has to get back to where it was during its glory days.”

For the rest of the month, the job of mayor will be filled by District 6 councillor Madeleine Hodgson, who was named pro-mayor. At the next council meeting scheduled for July 2, councillors will elect an interim mayor who will serve in that position until the next election on Nov. 3.

Elliott was first elected to the town of Hudson in 1977. He served three terms as a councillor, and then one term as mayor from 1989 to 1993, before he was defeated by Stephen Shaar. Elliott came back in 2009, and was acclaimed mayor, taking over for Elizabeth Corker, who had resigned. His first term as mayor was also contentious, as Hudson weathered the fallout of the Oka crisis, which happened across the Lake of Mountains. The town set up a mobile hospital and its police force logged many overtime hours during the 78-day standoff between Mohawks and police.

He was also mayor when the town adopted an anti-pesticide bylaw in 1991, banning the use of chemical lawn products. The bylaw was challenged by pesticide companies all the way up to the Supreme Court of Canada, which ruled in Hudson’s favour in 2001. The pesticide bylaw is one of Elliott’s proudest achievements.

Elliott said he won't retire, but rather go back to work as a carpenter and furniture maker. He said he was pleased with the work he has done, and expressed admiration for his fellow councillors. He had some parting advice for his successor.

"Keep your head down, and don't read too many of the local newspapers," he said. "Hudson is still the best little town in Canada."

jmagder@montrealgazette.com

© Copyright (c) The Montreal Gazette