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HUDSON

We're dealing with tax issues but can't talk about SQ investigation - Hudson's interim mayor reports



Terry O'Shaughnessy | From The Gazette | August 7, 2013

Hudson's interim mayor Diane Piacente has met with the Sûreté du Québec investigators looking into allegations of misappropriation of funds at town hall, but has little to report publicly.

Piacente took to the microphone before the regular monthly council meeting Monday to update residents about the ongoing SQ investigation – and the measures she and her council are putting in place to correct years of mismanagement in the municipality.

Piacente said she and councillor Rob Spencer met with the SQ on July 18 and, that while much was discussed in the meeting, they were asked to refrain from commenting publicly on the details of the investigation.

"We were asked to not comment yet," said Piacente. "In order to not hamper the ongoing investigation. Therefore, I won't be able to directly comment this evening. But I want to reassure residents of Hudson that I am doing all that I can to protect your interests."

This includes hiring the services of a tax lawyer and a labour lawyer to help unravel the intricacies of the payroll deductions at source "errors" that first sounded the alarm bell that all was not well in the municipality's books.

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Piacente went on to clearly state that she immediately sought legal guidance when she first learned of the taxable benefit tied to the employees' medical insurance program that had not been properly accounted for.

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"I requested that the director general be relieved of her duties," said Piacente.

"I basically said it was her resignation or mine."

Former DG Louise Villandr  left her post in April. Hudson has been without a DG since then – until now.

"After extensive interviews and careful deliberation, we have found our new DG," Piacente said. "Should the background check satisfy council, the candidate will be able to start perhaps the third week in August."

Piacente also had more to add about the unpaid property tax issue that emerged following the town's internal accounting audit where more than \$1.2 million in property taxes were discovered to be in arrears, in some cases going back several years. Former mayor Michael Elliott, who resigned for health reasons in June, was one of those lapsed property owners.

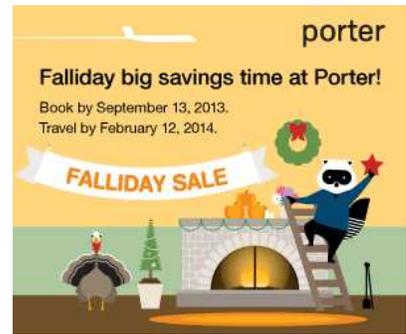
"A letter has been sent to all homeowners in arrears," said Piacente.

"More than \$400,000 in back property taxes are still owed, and after 60 days, the town will take further measures on any non-payer."

This effort will soon extend to the approximately \$200,000 in business taxes that are also still unpaid.

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