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WW council butts heads on cost review

Some councillors argue cost breakdowns not detailed enough

BY SAM SMITH, NORTH SHORE NEWS MARCH 3, 2013

THE West Vancouver council chamber heated up with a debate Monday night about what real insight they're getting with new, more detailed spending reports from municipal departments.

West Vancouver Mayor Michael Smith opened the meeting by saying the new reports were sure to "lead to much better decision making by council.

"This is a part of our council I've really been looking forward to," he said. "When you have more knowledge, you make better decisions."

But the first of those reports garnered mixed reviews, with two councillors complaining it wasn't detailed enough to answer questions from taxpayers.

The first of the new reports on municipal department expenses was presented to council by Anne Mooi, director of parks and community services.

But Coun. Michael Lewis said there wasn't enough in the report for him to communicate "the effectiveness and efficiency of this organization" to the public.

Lewis's main complaint was there weren't enough detailed cost breakdowns for some of the areas the parks and community services department handles that would allow council members to make different budget decisions.

Lewis cited an example about the number of grass cuttings for West Vancouver parks.

"What I know now is that there's five cuts a season," he said, pointing to the information on the report. "I have no idea what that equates to from a cost perspective. I know we have 135 hanging baskets - how much do they cost?"

He finished by saying he wants information he can point to and say the district should be saving money there by changing up the service a bit.

Coun. Craig Cameron echoed Lewis' statements, saying there was nothing truly useful in the reports.

"I don't know what to do with this," he said. Cameron said he was looking for numbers he could use to explain to the taxpayer where their money is going.

However, not everyone agreed.

Coun. Trish Panz said the report was an improvement. "I'm seeing innovation in front of me today that I didn't see two or three years ago," Panz said. "Let's keep building on that."

Coun. Mary-Ann Booth agreed.

"It's very user friendly, and this is an excellent start," she said.

Coun. Bill Soprovich said Lewis and Cameron were wrong and he could look at the reports and make informed decisions about the budget.

The report detailed 11 out of a total 37 services handled by Parks and Community Services, which accounts for nearly 20 per cent of the West Vancouver's total operating budget. The budget is split almost evenly between parks and community services, with three per cent covering administration costs.

More detailed reports are expected at the council meeting March 11.

editor@nsnews.com

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