

## PAYING A LAWYER \$400/HR AS RM OF MCKILLOP SECRETARY

BULYEA SK: There can be only two reasons why RM of McKillop Council continues to pay hefty amounts to legal counsel (over \$400/hr) to prevent financial and management audits and to prevent certain documents from seeing the light of day: (a) there's something that Council does not want ratepayers to know about; or (b) Council simply wants to spite the ratepayers association. Even if you generally support Council, as a ratepayer you must be asking yourself if these are worthy reasons for spending so much of your money.

If there's nothing to hide, Council and the administrator could fully cooperate with auditors (the audits were requested through petition but refused on advice of legal counsel, a report that RM Council will not release). Ratepayers received estimates of \$25,000 to \$100,000 for both audits together. If done, those audits would be a justifiable cost: they would, at the very least, help reveal ways in which the RM can be better run. As frequently suggested, Council could save ratepayers' money by providing better two-way communication, listening actively, making decisions transparently and following their own procedures and resolutions. And if it's established that there's nothing to hide, Council has the opportunity to make the ratepayers association "eat crow".

What *is* happening, though, is that the legal bills are mounting to prevent audits and disclosure of information. To the end of September 2017, Council has spent over \$68,000 (that we know about) on legal fees. In 2016, Council spent \$55,711 on legal fees and in 2015 \$14,932. The Council of our neighbor to the east, RM of Longlaketon No 219, has spent \$349.80 on legal fees in 2017 so far. What's so different between the Councils of RMs 220 and 219? Perhaps it's unnecessary spending by a Council that does not feel accountable to its ratepayers. Most recently, the RM of 220 "administrator" (we're still not sure if she has a contract) was unavailable to take minutes at two council meetings, thus causing Council, *twice*, to call in senior legal counsel from Regina for the day—to serve as *recording secretary*—at a cost of over \$8,000.

As a result, the ratepayers association looks like it's on to something. Reeve Arndt has suggested, without ever supplying a source or a basis for the number, that audits would cost \$250,000. There have been no audits, but we know that approaching \$200,000 of your *real* money has already been spent on bad contracts (high end computer system and office renovations) and unnecessary legal fees. It seems that Council's real intention is *pretending* to prevent spending a hypothetical \$250,000 while *actually mispending* a real \$200,000. If, as Reeve Arndt has threatened, \$250,000 would, *if it were in fact spent*, mean a 15% tax increase, that must mean that Council has foolishly spent a significant amount of your tax money on bad contracts and unnecessary legal bills. Also, at the October 16th meeting it was revealed that there's yet another RM purchase entered into by the "administrator" without Council approval for \$215,304 worth of gravel. As with the computer purchase, Council authorized this contract *after the fact* and paid for it, again with your money. Who is running this show: the "administrator," Council or some Councillors in a back room? As a Councillor was quoted as saying at the July 10th, 2017 meeting, 'When things go bad you buy your way out.' RM Council continues to behave this way because the majority can and don't care what you think about it.

Council currently thinks it's none of your business what it does with your money. Section 117 of the *Municipalities Act* imposes a legal obligation on the administrator (the Act uses the word "shall") to provide contracts, invoices and other documents to you for a fee. But Council, through the "administrator" uses legal counsel to prevent access to information through audits, and won't provide documents—or at least won't provide them without the information that you're really interested in blacked out. Even the bits that they will give you are uninformative because the 'list of accounts' appended to minutes of RM meetings are very general and give you no accurate indication of what money is actually being spent on. If you don't believe us, try requesting information yourself. If you discover something you don't like about how your money's being spent, as Bruce Willis said in the original, and best, Die Hard movie, 'Welcome to the party pal.'

**BACKGROUND:** The Rural Municipality of McKillop No. 220 lies along the east shore of Last Mountain Lake, north of Lumsden. There are 732 permanent residents and approximately 2,000 ratepayers in the RM.

If you have any questions please contact us at [rm220rpa@gmail.com](mailto:rm220rpa@gmail.com)

Thank you.

