

Message

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Sent: 3/8/2013 4:24:42 PM
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CC: PowerStream Corporate Communication [/O=POWERSTREAM/OU=First Administrative Group/cn=Recipients/cn=PowerStreamCorporateCommunication]
Subject: Simcoe.com/Collingwood Connection article - Collingwood Mayor "disheartened," by CBC report

Collingwood Mayor "disheartened," by CBC report

21 minutes ago.

Collingwood Connection by John Edwards

Officials from the Ontario Provincial Police won't confirm whether they are investigating Town of Collingwood officials for alleged wrongdoing.

A CBC report Friday claimed three Collingwood residents have filed complaints with the OPP over concerns of alleged conflicts of interest and other wrongdoing, including bid-tampering involving the sale of the grain terminals.

"We're aware of the conversation and media reports around Collingwood in regards to the reports that we're investigating municipal corruption allegations," said Sgt. Pierre Chamberland of the OPP's corporate communications department. "We don't speak about anything that may be an active case going on - it's not always apparent that we're conducting an investigation."

The CBC report said the investigation centers around Mayor Sandra Cooper, Councillor Ian Chadwick and Deputy Mayor Rick Lloyd and their relationship with former MP Paul Bonwick. Bonwick is Mayor Sandra Cooper's brother, and he operates Compenso Communications, a government relations and communications firm. All have denied any wrongdoing.

"People need to understand that there are quite literally tens of thousands of people employed in the government relations industry," he said. "We have two companies right here in Collingwood. One run by former Collingwood mayor Chris Carrier and one is mine."

"The intention behind the government relations business is to work with companies that don't have the in-house expertise to weed through government bureaucracy, develop a public relations campaign and develop a winning environment for the initiative they are trying to put forward," Bonwick told the Connection Friday after the report aired.

"Government is complex business, that's why regular businesses feel there is value in paying people who have experience in public relations and dealing with government," he said.

Bonwick has done work with Georgian Manor Resort and Powerstream, two companies that have had interests in the municipality.

Bonwick said he is "disappointed," by the allegations. He believes the claims and complaints are politically motivated.

This isn't the first time the OPP has been called in to investigate alleged municipal wrongdoing. In 2005, the anti-racket squad investigated complaints of improprieties among members of council. The allegations at that time were determined to be unfounded.

"This is the third time these tactics have been implemented," he said. "There were allegations made about wrongdoing. There was an investigation and there was found to be no wrongdoing, in fact the police were very critical of the situation and how it unfolded. At that time, in the community, it was recognized it was for purely political reasons. In the end, all it does is divide the community and harms families and that's unfortunate."

Bonwick said he was hired by the Georgian Manor in September, 2012 and helped the resort develop a communications strategy including radio advertisements and promotional material.

He said he was offered a two-year contract to run the communications and media operations for the resort, but turned it down.

"I declined on the offer. I didn't feel I would bring any serious value to the table," he said.

Peter Levoy, owner of Georgian Manor, said Bonwick was paid a \$20,000 retainer but he declined the offer on a longer agreement.

"It was Paul who came back to us and said this isn't going to be in your best interest," Levoy said.

Levoy said his company is not involved in pursuing a casino. He said his organization doesn't have the resources to build a resort as has been discussed at Collingwood council.

He does believe the integrated destination resort would be good for the area.

Collingwood council voted 5-4, in November, not to pursue a 300-slot casino with the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corporation.

Bonwick also worked for Powerstream, the company that bought 50 per cent of Collus for about \$15 million in January, 2012. The council vote to sell the electric utility to Powerstream was unanimous.

Bonwick said before he entered an agreement with Powerstream, he met with the former chair of Collus, the late Dean Muncaster, Clerk Sara Almas, then CAO Kim Wingrove and Mayor Sandra Cooper. He said they "laid out the strategy that Powerstream was considering offering me a contract."

"We wanted full disclosure on that," he said.

Bonwick said his role was to develop a communications strategy regarding the future of local distribution companies and to "educate the public and elected officials without having any direct involvement with elected officials."

The Town of Collingwood released a statement on Friday afternoon. The town said they have not been contacted by the OPP. The statement said the town is "disheartened," by the allegations contained in the CBC story.

"If in fact we receive official notice about any police investigation, town staff and councillors will work co-operatively with the authorities to ensure a proper and timely resolution so that Council and staff can continue to dedicate their energies to positive efforts for the town," said Mayor Sandra Cooper.

"These allegations are disheartening to those of us who have worked so hard in serving the best interests of our community – nevertheless we will move forward on our successes and continue to seek the public's input on the various initiatives that Council is working on."

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