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Etobicoke Guardian

Hall's motion delays tax increases

July 17, 2007 by David Nickle

Ward 1 (Etobicoke North) Councillor Suzan Hall may have kept a low profile for most of the nearly seven years she's served as a Toronto councillor. But that changed Monday afternoon, when she tabled the motion to delay the implementation of two controversial taxes, and in so doing opened the door to the first successful defiance of the will of Mayor David Miller.

"It's probably the most difficult decision I've ever had to make, and that's in 23 years of politics," said Hall Tuesday morning, after council voted 23-22 to put off dealing with a land transfer tax and vehicle registration tax that would together raise \$356 million to deal with the city's \$575 million estimated shortfall.

Hall said she had been torn on the issue until a meeting with representatives from the Toronto Board of Trade just over a week ago. The board, which is on record opposing the tax increases, helped Hall decide that council needed to wait before deciding to implement the new taxes, and instead apply pressure on the provincial Liberals to reverse downloading.

"I accept the fact that we have a \$575-million deficit - there are certain things we could do to reduce that deficit but we're not going to find \$575 million," she said. "But I always did feel about this that if we had the uploading taken care of we wouldn't need to impose this particular tax. It did come to me that I was always of that mind, and I did mention it when I was being lobbied by the Board of Trade. They said, 'you've got a prime opportunity with the election, and we would be happy to work with you.' So I'm going to call them on that."

Hall maintains that the city needs to put pressure on all three political parties, perhaps encouraging individual candidates to sign a pledge agreeing to upload the hundreds of millions of dollars of services that the city has had to deliver since amalgamation.

"There is a reality that we need to have more money - so why don't we have a pledge where we ask every candidate across the province to sign the pledge," she said. "Tell people to put their money where their mouth is."

Hall said she was under intense pressure to out-and-out oppose the new taxes - particularly after an interview with her that appeared in The Etobicoke Guardian.

"The pressure on me was not great until Friday when the Guardian article came out - so it was that day on Friday that the calls started coming in," she said. "But I'd already decided what I was going to do - I'd been playing telephone tag with the mayor, saying this is what I was going to do," she said. "The pressure was not necessarily nice, some was polite, asking me not to do it, some were threats as people choose to do."

Ultimately, Hall said she'd prefer not to impose any of the new taxes.

"How do we get the money? I prefer to get it from uploading."

The motion led to a major defeat for Mayor David Miller. But Hall said she hopes he doesn't take it personally.

"I was up-front - I'm not underhanded," she said. "I don't deal on a personal basis, I deal with issues. I respect the mayor but I deal with issues. I'm not attacking anybody - I'm attacking the issue."