

Resident demands answers ³⁹



By [GORD YOUNG](#), The Nugget

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James Brien is demanding more answers from city politicians about how the Memorial Gardens renovations went off the rails.

The North Bay resident appeared before council Monday, raising a number of questions about how the project price tag ballooned from \$12 million to \$16.2 million and who at city hall was aware of what was happening.

"I have some questions as a taxpayer who is going to be one those footing the bill for this debacle," said Brien, asking who on council and within city administration was aware there was no basis for the original \$12-million price and that estimates early on in the process put the project over that amount.

Brien pointed to the findings of a KPMG audit which indicated it was the responsibility of Peter Chirico, the city's managing director of community services to communicate the cost overruns to Jerry Knox, the city's chief administrative officer, or to council. And he questioned if Chirico was allowed to operate on his own without any accountability.

Brien also asked whose responsibility it was to ensure supervision of change orders and why the cost of installing a kitchen and renovating concessions was not included in the original estimate. In addition, he questioned the inclusion of \$1 million of federal funding in the original price for which the project was not eligible.

"Was nobody aware that the federal government had already refused funding to build an arena in Quebec to support an NHL bid?" he asked, questioning if the city applied directly to the government or if it was promised the funding by Nipissing-Timiskaming MP Jay Aspin.

Brien pointed to \$600,000 in overruns approved by council August and questioned why the city's finance department was not involved.

"Did none of you who were sitting councillors at the time ever suspect that something was going awry in all of this?" he asked. "Were you denied information?"

Brien suggested if no one around the council table was aware of what was happening that they failed in fulfilling their duties to taxpayers to ensure money was being spent wisely. And if anyone on council or within administration did know what was going on behind the scenes and did nothing, he suggested they erred by omission or by purposely misleading taxpayers.

"In any case the result is reprehensible and unforgivable because it speaks to the amateurism, and immature cheerleading that was displayed from the beginning of this doomed project," he said.

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SEE Presentation Text Below

PRESENTATION TO NORTH BAY CITY COUNCIL

REGARDING THE ARENA RENOVATION

Monday March 17th, 2014

Your worship and councillors:

I am here this evening to address some issues regarding the recent auditor's report with respect to the overruns in the renovations to Memorial Gardens. I have some questions -as a taxpayer who is going to be one of those "footing the bill" for this.

I now refer you to the quotations of the auditor as cited from the North Bay Nugget from which I have some pertinent questions:

- 1) If there was "no support" for the \$ 12 million estimate, who on this council and the city administration knew about the flimsy planning for the renovation that this indicates? Who knew?
- 2) If the early estimates *provided to the city* put the project over the \$12 million dollar price tag from the outset. Who on this council and in the city administration knew? Who knew?
- 3) If sole responsibility was given to Peter Chirico as managing director of community services, to communicate cost overruns to Mr. Knox or to council, does this mean that the Council and or the administration allowed him to *operate on his own* without any accountability? Did you not question, as a council what was going on? Who knew?
- 4) If there was "inadequate supervision" of change orders, then whose responsibility was it to ensure that there was such supervision? Who knew?
- 5) Why was the \$500,000 cost of renovating the kitchen and concession areas not included in the original estimate? Who knew?
- 6) The \$1 million federal contribution was factored into the original estimate. Did Mr. J. Aspin promise federal funding or that he would look into it or did the city apply directly to the federal government for such funding. Was nobody aware that

the federal government had already refused funding to build an arena in Quebec to support an NHL bid? Who knew?

7) Since there were \$600,000 in overruns approved by this council in August, did none of you who were sitting councillors at the time ever suspect that something was going awry in all of this? Were you denied information?

8) Was the city's finance department involved in this huge project? If it was NOT involved, then was it the intent of the Mayor and council to push through the renovation DESPITE THE COSTS so that there would not be any oversight from the accounting department?

Who knew?

If none of you who were sitting elected officials at the time knew what was going on then you were not fulfilling your duties to the taxpayers to ensure that our money was being spent wisely.

If on the other hand any of you or the city administration *did* know what was going on behind the scenes and did nothing about it then you have erred by omission or you have erred by purposely misleading the taxpayers in an effort to have this renovation go ahead no matter the cost.

In any case the result is reprehensible and unforgivable because it speaks to the amateurism and immature cheerleading that was displayed from the beginning of this doomed project that despite any reallocation of capital funding and postponement of other capital projects STILL PUTS THE ONUS TO PAY ON THE TAXPAYERS OF THIS CITY.

In concluding I have observed that people who have the guts to question what officials do are not liked for their "second guessing" and are treated with a fair bit of disdain; however, I would leave you with a quote from George Orwell which I see as pertinent to the issues which I have brought forward tonight: "The further a society drifts from the Truth, the more it will hate those who speak it".