

Notes for Press Conference
September 25, 2007
12:15 P.M.

Concerned citizens and members of the press.

I'd like to start by thanking, first and foremost the residents of Windsor who have shared their concerns and offered their support to the Windsor Association of Concerned Taxpayers or WeAct.

On behalf of WeACT, I would also like to thank George Sofos, owner of the Junction, for selflessly donating this space so we can hold our public meetings.

I'll begin with a quotation from anthropologist and feminist Margaret Mead:

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

Last week, Windsor Association of Concerned Taxpayers demanded a full and complete financial, business and operational investigation of the WUC and any third party relationships with Enwin by an independent third party. On behalf of taxpayers, we also wished to have input into the Terms of Reference before they are finalized by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs .

We also demanded the following from our City Council and our provincial cabinet ministers, Dwight Duncan and Sandra Pupatello. Of our city council we demanded that they:

1. Withdraw the motion calling for a provincial-municipal audit;
2. Apologize properly to the citizens of Windsor for their shameful behaviour and actions respecting the WUC/Enwin matter; and
3. To clarify the issue of potential conflicts of interest, they must immediately bring an application under Section 7 of the Municipal Conflicts of Interest Act to ask a Judge for direction on notice to citizens so that any who wish, may intervene to assist the Court.
4. Properly introduce a new motion, with full public participation calling upon the Auditor General to conduct a broad-based inquiry and audit.

Of our Liberal cabinet ministers we asked:

1. That MPP's Sandra Pupatello and Dwight Duncan immediately ask the Auditor General, under section 17 of the Auditor General Act, to undertake a “special assignment” - a value for money audit of WUC and Enwin ;

2. In the alternative, that they immediately ask the Minister of Municipal Affairs under Section 10 of the Municipal Affairs Act to “make an inquiry into any of the affairs of a municipality” and in particular with respect to the WUC/Enwin matter as was requested in the Mayor’s motion; and finally

3. The terms of reference of either alternative must be discussed with the citizens of Windsor at a special meeting called for that purpose so citizens can finally express their opinion as to what should be done.

We have called you here today to state unequivocally we intend to pursue our plan of action. We did not demand anything too onerous a task. We demanded accountability. We demanded transparency. We demanded answers.

Our message is clear – we do not simply talk about a plan of action. We Act.

The response from our elected officials, namely Councillor Ken Lewenza Jr. and Liberal M.P.P. Dwight Duncan were most unfortunate as they were dismissive of the concerns of residents. Rather than provide fact-based dialogue they felt it prudent to not only discredit the concerns of residents, but also to smear the call to action from our association. Rather than acknowledge and defend the rights that the citizens of Windsor have, Dwight Duncan chose to defend the City of Windsor from taxpayers.

We believe our demands are reasonable and are reflective of the concerns and needs of the voting taxpayers in Windsor.

Liberals, New Democrats, Greens and Progressive Conservatives in the city have united, not to “beat up the municipality” as Dwight Duncan claims, but to demand action. To demand accountability. To represent our concerns on an \$830 million bill that will impact taxpayers now and into the future.

Our elected officials must remember what VOTE means – the Voice of Taxpayers Everywhere. Today, we stand united to remind them of this obligation, their contract, if you may, with the residents of the City of Windsor.

It’s about respect.

We deserve no less.

So, what are we going to do?

First, we acknowledge that we are currently arranging a meeting with WUC Chair Ken Lewenza. Despite his past insulting comments regarding the actions of our association, we welcome the opportunity to discuss our demands.

However, we laid out a comprehensive plan of action – an action plan that demanded meaningful discussion and compliance with our demands within a week.

While we look forward to meeting with Councillor Lewenza, we have filed our application to the Ontario Municipal Board, which you all have been provided a copy of. If our demands are honoured, we will withdraw our application to the Ontario Municipal Board.

Briefly, our OMB Application states that it is our opinion that with respect to the Motion regarding the Windsor Utilities Commission investigation, the City of Windsor has contravened or failed to comply with the requirements of the Municipal Act and the City's Procedural By-law.

It is also our position that any action by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs carried out as a result of the Motion being passed is also improper and a nullity.

In our opinion, the only valid Motion was the one which requested that the Ontario Auditor General investigate this matter. That Motion was never heard and so was never voted on.

We do not seek confrontation – we simply demand that the wrongs as of late be corrected – that council respond to the wishes of the hard working citizens of Windsor. If no such resolution can be found – WE will ACT accordingly.

On the issue of potential conflicts of interest for our Mayor and some members of council who serve on the board of the Windsor Utilities Commission – our resolve is clear. Though the City of Windsor now seems to have changed their position and stated that there is no conflict of interest, we continue to believe otherwise.

However, the legal cost of undertaking such an application is enormous. The City of Windsor has at their disposal your tax dollars to hire lawyers to act for them. We, the residents of Windsor and members of WeACT have only our pay cheques.

This is the reality that we face.

Therefore, WeACT will establish a Legal Fund to which taxpayers may contribute to assist us in our endeavour. What other recourse is available to citizens when we are not even able to make council presentations. The purpose of this legal fund is to assist us with funding any potential challenges regarding conflicts of interest in the WUC matter; and to ensure that taxpayers in the City of Windsor will have a both a ways and a means of making legitimate challenges of decisions made by City Hall.

It will serve to hold our elected representatives accountable.

Donations to the fund would be anonymous if a taxpayer so chose, thereby eliminating any perceived or real concerns of retribution. The fund could grow, with what WeACT believes to be a symbolic gesture of a donation of an amount equalling one month of your new water bill.

The time for this is long overdue. The time has come for citizens to have a method of recourse.

Finally, WeACT continues to have concerns over the nature of the conversation between our M.P.P's, the Mayor's office and the Ministry, particularly since Dwight Duncan has expressed publicly that he is more concerned about protecting the City from ratepayers than he is in representing the residents. We call upon our provincial Ministers to disclose the details of these conversations to put to rest any suspicion of exerting influence.

This is not a blame game.

This is not about agendas or personal motivations.

This is all about accountability, transparency and public participation in the process.

Full, open and meaningful discussions with the public, by all levels of government, will yield better results for all ratepayers in Windsor.

We are not out to change the world. Nor are we out to "beat up" our city – the city which each and every one of us cares deeply and passionately about.

We are demanding our place at the table.

We are demanding that our elected officials represent our desires – without intimidation nor condemnation.

The thoughtful and committed residents are demanding respect.

To Minister Dwight Duncan and Councillor Lewenza – accountability is our agenda; the concerns of residents are our motivation.

We are committed and we will not rest until the concerns of residents are addressed accordingly.