

Caron resigns as Londonderry town manager

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By APRIL GUILMET

Union Leader Correspondent

LONDONDERRY — As citizens and town officials gathered at Town Hall on Monday night to address the town's improper usage of municipal impact fees, members of the Town Council announced the resignation of Town Manager David Caron.

Caron's resignation, effective July 20, comes several weeks after he announced his leave of absence, citing a family medical emergency. Police Chief Bill Hart has been serving as interim town manager since mid-June.

"During that time, it's become apparent to the Town Council that the combination of a family emergency and the recent impact fee situation means the time has come to sever ties," Council Chairman John Farrell said. "We wish (Caron) all the best."

Farrell said Caron's family member has had multiple medical procedures and is reportedly faring well. He stressed the search for a new, permanent town manager will commence "immediately."

Monday night's public discussion on the impact fees issue was attended by a handful of citizens and town officials, as well as local attorney Mike Ramsdell, who spoke on behalf of the town.

Farrell said the Town Council contacted Ramsdell immediately after it became apparent there was an error in Londonderry's impact fees collection.

The town has been collecting municipal impact fees from developers and residents since the 1990s, Farrell said. However, state law doesn't permit usage of the fees for improvements on state highways, and the town will be required to return all applicable fees.

Farrell said the town is already in the process of returning funds to citizens, and the town has already identified 25 properties in which the refund amount is greater than \$5,000. There are more than 400 properties with lower refund amounts and most of those are less than \$1,000.

Londonderry will work with the courts to determine who should properly receive funds, Farrell stressed.

"We hope that the affected citizens will be able to reach an agreement with the town without further superior court action," he added, noting that the total amount owed to citizens and developers is estimated to be between \$1.2 and \$1.3 million.

Londonderry has around \$1 million of those funds in an escrow account.

Town officials noted the process of issuing refunds is already under way, and Hart said he's issued changes to the impact fee process to make sure further errors don't occur.

"We can't fix the past; we can only fix the future going forward," Councilor Tom Dolan added. "This was a very long-standing practice, and we believed we were doing the right thing. Turns out, we were not."

Dolan further noted the council has unanimously agreed that refunding applicable impact fees is the right thing to do, regardless of the statute of limitations.

Ramsdell said impact fees were used toward various projects, including the pending development of Pettengill Road and the town's newest fire station.

Resident Pauline Caron (no relation to Town Manager David Caron) suggested the town release a list of all the projects.

"Our goal is to be as transparent as possible," Hart replied. "So if this can be done, we'll definitely do it."

The impact fee schedule was required to be annually reviewed, Caron noted. Ramsdel said that hasn't been the case. "It's been reviewed periodically," he admitted.

Rep. Al Baldasaro, R-Londonderry, said he'd approached David Caron with suspicions of improper impact fee usage last year.

"I'm glad this is finally being addressed," he told the council.

aguilmet@newstote.com