

Behind the curtain 9



BY RICK BELL, QMI AGENCY

FIRST POSTED: TUESDAY, JANUARY 31, 2012 09:56 PM MST | UPDATED: TUESDAY, JANUARY 31, 2012 10:10 PM MST



Old City Hall reflects on the windows of new city hall in downtown Calgary. STUART DRYDEN
CALGARY SUN

 Recommend

City hall is abuzz Tuesday, the day after the mayor calls in a psychotherapist to straighten out a council he obviously feels needs professional help.

In fact, Nenshi is so concerned the professional head reader is on deck for possibly even more therapy sessions with the politicians.



[Report an error](#)

Much of the talk this day is at a low volume since some on council are now openly questioning who needs the help, them or the mayor?

The mayor?

The mayor who is so popular, the most popular politician in the land by his own admission.

The mayor who is so funny and such a good speaker and a wonderful attender of events and a titan on Twitter and a possessor of true believing followers who pounce with the ferocity of Kool-Aid drinkers if you don't toe the purple party line.

Yes, that mayor.

The aldermen offer up smidgens of info on what brought Nenshi to bring in Dr. Zendel, the renowned prober of psyches.

But they are smidgens, nothing official because all the juice is closed-doors stuff, the usual top-secret routine at the city these days.

Piecing together the crumbs we gather a couple weeks back at a ... you got it ... closed-door meeting Ald. Gian-Carlo Carra, a confidante of the mayor, lays into one of the city brass.

Aldermen variously describe the set-to as over-the-top, crossing the line, abusive, bullying, something you'd see it in a bar. Ugly.

A couple of aldermen apparently leave. Some speak up and ask Nenshi to shut down the argy-bargy and want Carra to shut up.

This is all behind closed doors.

Later, in an e-mail not for our eyes, aldermen confide Carra says sorry and then tries to explain. Some are not impressed with the sorry but let me tell you approach. One calls it a dissertation.

Nenshi's people said he wouldn't comment Tuesday and therefore couldn't confirm an e-mail sent by the mayor saying everyone behaved badly.

Last weekend, we get Nenshi pulling in a therapist for a closed-door session of aldermanic rehab, a little counselling for council.

Six aldermen vote against the stunt and they represent political opinions from Ald. Brian Pincott to Ald. Andre Chabot.

On Monday, Ald. Gord Lowe tells Nenshi "you're not the chief operating officer and I'm not one of your general managers."

Realizing council didn't have the power to change this brainwave out of the blue since this was Nenshi's special meeting, Lowe points out no one has to attend.

Nenshi shoots back it is "absolutely their prerogative" to vamoose "if members of council are interested in a dysfunctional group that is not working well."

Yes, it's the old squeeze play. If you won't come to a meeting for the supposedly dysfunctional that proves you're dysfunctional.

Since Mayor Open and Transparent took the job, there's been more closed-door meetings. Heck, there have been longer public meetings, gabfests with less control from the top than you see in a sugar-high Grade 8 class tormenting a rookie substitute teacher.

There's also been irritation since the mayor has lost almost as many votes as the Oilers have lost games on the road. But, believe it or not, the aldermen aren't as scratch-out-the-eyes nasty as in the days of Bronco. It's not Kumbaya but it's not Dirty Deeds Done Dirt Cheap.

At the same time, the mayor is known to dish it out. During the budget he disses aldermen for treating Calgarians like an ATM machine and then, after cashing in his political points, votes with the people he slams.

Ald. Dale Hodges with 28 years in council has never seen anything like it.

"This is a new experiment," says Hodges, figuring a majority on council would have nixed Nenshi's closed-door designs.

He hopes there isn't any more assistance from council's very own Sigmund Freud.

"Hopefully it will end with, that's interesting but we don't need further assistance from this gentleman. Thanks a lot."

Ald. Diane Colley-Urquhart aka Big Red says the mayor has a "really short fuse" and "gets really defensive."

It's not smooth sailing for the man Big Red thinks sees himself as "the knight in shining armour saving us from ourselves."

Big Red says Nenshi's use of the word "dysfunctional" needs to be explained and slams the mayor for "double talk about openness" when so much is done behind closed doors.

Pincott asks whether the mayor sees his role in what's going on and says this chatter about a dysfunctional council has done big damage.

Chabot says "13 members of council get along perfectly well." Two don't, guess who?

Lowe speaks of "an absence of leadership."

Carra?

He is "not at liberty to discuss" the closed doors stuff though says the therapist is "a good thing."