

Aldermen off on \$30,000 trip

11 councillors will attend Quebec meeting

Colette Derworiz

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Eleven city council members are jetting off to Quebec City this week to meet other municipal leaders, prompting critics to question the value of sending so many delegates to the annual gathering.

Mayor Dave Bronconnier and 10 aldermen will leave for Quebec in the coming days to attend the Federation of Canadian Municipalities' conference, from Thursday until Sunday.

It will cost between \$30,000 and \$35,000 for the group.

The annual conference has sparked criticism in recent years, particularly in 2005 when roughly \$50,000 was spent for 14 of 15 council members to go to Newfoundland.

Scott Hennig, spokesman for the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, said he has similar concerns this year.

"I'm not convinced that taxpayers are getting value for their money, period," he said.

"I'm not sure what benefit there is of going to (the conference). Moreover, I don't know what the benefit is of sending 10 aldermen.

"I understand brand new aldermen going, seeing what the issues are, seeing how (these conferences) go."

Three of the four rookie aldermen will attend this year's conference.

Veteran aldermen who are heading to Quebec City said it's important to have a strong turnout at the event.

"It's the only time during the year that we get any national input from our colleagues and we work directly with them," said Ald. Joe Ceci, who is council's representative on the Federation of Canadian Municipalities. "It's also a time where we get to talk about what the City of Calgary is doing with our colleagues from across the nation.

"We're punching over our weight; we're leaders and seen as leaders."

Calgary hosted the conference last year, attracting more than 1,900 delegates -- the largest turnout ever for the organization's annual get-together.

"We were in the black -- over \$100,000," Ceci said of the Calgary conference. "We set the bar . . . and it's great to go and support others who are trying to improve what was seen as breaking new ground in Calgary."

Ald. Ray Jones, one of the four aldermen not attending this year's gathering in Quebec



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Members of Calgary city council are headed to Quebec City.

City, said he doesn't see a need to go every year.

"I go every three years," he said. "I don't think everybody has to go every year.

"If you go every two or three years, that's just fine."

Other aldermen who are not attending the annual conference include Diane Colley-Urquhart, Dale Hodges and Jim Stevenson.

Trips to conferences of the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association and the Federation of Canadian Municipalities are covered by the overall aldermanic office budget.

Two aldermen are also selected each year to attend Quebec Carnival and the Grey Cup.

According to the aldermanic office manager, the total cost -- including flight and accommodation -- for each alderman to attend the Quebec conference this weekend is between \$2,700 and \$3,000. Any hosting done by aldermen at the conference must be covered by their individual office budgets.

The City of Edmonton is sending 10 of its 12 city councillors to this year's gathering.

cderworiz@theherald.canwest.com

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