

## Alderman urges council to review flag protocol

**Kim Guttormson, with files from Colette Derworiz, Calgary Herald.**

Calgary Herald

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An alderman wants to re-examine when the city lowers its flags to mark the death of a local soldier, following confusion about the practice this week.

Cpl. Michael Starker, a Calgary paramedic, was killed Tuesday while on patrol in Afghanistan.

The city was to fly the flags in front of Old City Hall at half-staff today, when Starker's body arrives back in Canada, but they were also lowered Thursday. They will stay at half-mast until sunset the day of his funeral.

Flags at EMS headquarters were lowered the day of Starker's death, and the flags at all City of Calgary facilities will be lowered the day of his funeral. The city also has a condolence book in the City Hall atrium.

There appears to be no written policy about when city flags are lowered in the case of a soldier's death.

Starker is the fourth Calgarian to be killed in the war in Afghanistan.

Ald. Andre Chabot wants a policy in writing and he believes the flags should be lowered when the news breaks.

"I think they should have been lowered immediately," he said, adding he wondered why the EMS flags were down but not those at City Hall.

Mayor Dave Bronconnier said the question of when the flags were lowered this week detracts from the more important issue.

"I don't believe in distractions in what should truly be a focus on a fallen Canadian soldier, a City of Calgary employee, a husband, a son, a brother, who has lost his life," he said Thursday. "I'm not going to allow a controversy . . . to overshadow what this community is going through, which is the loss of a young Canadian.

"Our focus is and will remain on assisting the family and the employees at the City of Calgary who are grieving."

At its meeting Monday, council will have a moment of silence for Starker.

Others agreed the city's flag protocol isn't an issue.

"Like our military leave policy for our city reservists, our flag policy is honourable, exemplary and respectful. I have no further comment at this difficult time," said Ald. Diane Colley-Urquhart, who sits on the Canadian Forces liaison council.

Colleen Rowe, executive director of the Calgary Military Family Resource Centre, said the timing of lowering the flags at City Hall has never been raised as an issue for local military



CREDIT: Grant Black, Calgary Herald

The Canadian flag in front of Old City Hall was lowered to half-mast on Thursday to honour Cpl. Michael Starker, who died Tuesday in Afghanistan.

families.

There is no standard policy for municipal buildings across Canada. Some, like Edmonton, home of 3 Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, lower flags the day of the funeral.

The federal government has also been criticized for not lowering the Peace Tower flag to half-mast when a Canadian soldier is killed overseas.

One former military man walking through City Hall on Thursday said he believes the flags should be lowered right away, "especially for a city employee, like (Starker) was."

But Gareth Williams said the timing doesn't matter as much as the act itself.

"Lowering the flag is an additional statement that (the death) doesn't go unrecognized," he said.

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