

Mayor Nenshi calls in psychologist to help council get along

BY JASON MARKUSOFF JANUARY 30, 2012 2:58 PM

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Some aldermen oppose Naheed Nenshi's move to call in a mediator — an unidentified psychologist — to a special meeting the mayor called for Monday.

Photograph by: Gavn Young, Calgary Herald

CALGARY — Mayor Naheed Nenshi's bid to improve council harmony actually wound up exposing tensions between him and veteran aldermen.

Many of them opposed his move to call in a mediator — an unidentified psychologist — to a special meeting the mayor called for Monday.

Before they went behind closed doors to attend the session, Ald. Gord Lowe was so uncomfortable with the mayor's plans that he mused about skipping.

Nenshi had sent a confidential e-mail to colleagues this weekend about he wanted the facilitator's session to unfold.

"I take very little comfort with what I read," Lowe told council.

When the Ward 2 member noted that Nenshi sets the agenda but aldermen don't have to attend, it prompted a stern response from the mayor.

"I would find it extraordinary if any member of council did not want to attend a meeting on how council can work together better," Nenshi said.

"But if members of council are interested in a dysfunctional group that is not working well together, it is absolutely their prerogative. not working well together."

Nenshi and Lowe have clanged swords several times, most notably on the airport tunnel and the budget.

The mayor's motion to go in camera for hold Monday's session — usually a non-controversial vote — passed by a 9-6 margin. Of the nine council members who have served more than one term, six of them voted in protest against the mayor's plan: Lowe, Andre Chabot, Brian Pincott, John Mar, Dale Hodges and Diane Colley-Urquhart.

Most members appear to agree that council could take some steps to get along together better, especially after one closed-door session earlier this month on a planning item that sources say got particularly testy.

"It's about how people treat each other; how can council get along better," Colley-Urquhart said. Nenshi agreed that was the gathering's purpose. It was also held for council's private strategy session on how to work with the federal and provincial governments.

But the veterans, who have served on the Dave Bronconnier council that Nenshi has repeatedly depicted as much more divisive, are frustrated that the mayor alone was making up the rules for this facilitator's session.

"We haven't had a chance to discuss what it is we want to see as outcomes," said Chabot. He asked to make amend the mayor's agenda, but Nenshi quickly interrupted him.

"You can't," the mayor said, pointing to the council procedure rules. Council can amend normal meeting agendas, but the mayor can unilaterally set the agenda for a special meeting.

Nenshi noted that other members had asked for a special meeting to discuss council behaviour and togetherness.