



SEAN KILPATRICK/SUN

Ottawa Mayor Larry O'Brien plans to take over final signing authority from the city manager on all contracts and hires. It's an assumption of authority that would be better left in other hands says one governance expert.

Signing off on a bad idea

Micromanagement could backfire on O'Brien, says expert

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Sun Media

Mayor Larry O'Brien's decision to supervise final approval of all contracts and new hires for the remainder of the year runs counter to good governance principles, says a local governance expert.

"Citizens should be concerned that if the mayor is busy doing that, then imagine all the other important things that actually relate to governing that he is not doing," said Susan Mogensen, CEO of the International Policy Governance Association and a governance consultant.

The mayor said he will be taking over as the final signoff between Oct. 1 and Dec. 31, a duty that has been performed

by city manager Kent Kirkpatrick.

"The mayor wants to exercise control, but there are good and bad ways to control operations," said Mogensen.

The mayor should resist the urge to micro-manage, which can prove to be both highly inefficient and disempowering and demotivating for staff, she said.

Instead, O'Brien and councillors should establish criteria for good contract decisions and delegate the job to the city manager. Council should then use a monitoring process to ensure the criteria are being followed.

Good governance would have the council and mayor together serving as the top authority and being accountable to the citizens and then

delegating their authority efficiently to the city manager and staff, said Mogensen.

"I'm not sure what O'Brien's idea of good governance is, but this isn't consistent with good governance principles at all," she said.

Attempts to contact the mayor's representative yesterday were unsuccessful. City spokesman Barre Campbell said Kirkpatrick won't be issuing any statements this weekend.

Rideau-Goulbourn Coun. Glenn Brooks said there is no better person than O'Brien with his business background to provide the "sober second thought" needed to analyze whether the city is getting top value for its money.

It's that critical analysis that has been missing from

the upper echelons of city management, said the councillor.

"I don't have a problem with our mayor showing the kind of leadership that will look after our taxpayer dollars in a better way than we have in the past seven years," said Brooks.

Spending freeze

The mayor's comments could be a signal that he will be imposing a hiring and spending freeze until the new budget is approved, which is a common practice, speculated Coun. Peter Hume.

If a freeze is what O'Brien is proposing, then council must give direction before stepping back to let the managers do their jobs.

"We certainly don't want the mayor to become a bureaucrat," he said.



MOGENSEN
Concerned

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