

Welland council clashes over closed-door meeting on condo collapse

In-camera meeting cancelled at special council meeting

By [Dave Johnson](#) Tribune Reporter
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Welland city council collapsed into chaos over an in-camera meeting on 350 Prince Charles Dr. — Upper Vista Welland Condominiums — that was pulled from Tuesday’s special council meeting.

City clerk Tara Stephens said the closed-doors portion was deleted from the agenda because there is an active investigation by the Ministry of Labour into two collapses, eight days apart, at the 226-unit, five-storey, two-tower building under construction.

“The information provided through the press is all we have. There is no further information to discuss,” Stephens told council.

That answer didn’t satisfy Ward 3 Coun John Chiocchio, who raised a point of order to talk about the item being removed from the agenda.

He said he was flabbergasted there was no update on the collapses at the site.

“I am sure the mayor knows more and has more information ... our building official must know more. The people want to know. Council deserves the right to know what happened,” said Chiocchio.

Vice-mayor Leo Van Vliet, who was running the meeting, told the councillor he had all the information available.

After the two collapses, city officials and Evertrust Development, owners of the condominium complex, sent releases to the media. The Ministry of Labour also responded to information requests from The Tribune.

Van Vliet said there was no more news to release.

“There’s no discussion on this. It had nothing to do with us. This is between the developer and the ministry. It’s not up to council to decide on this,” said Van Vliet.

Chiocchio called the two collapses a “disaster.”

“That’s my ward, and people want to know what’s going on. To say that the mayor only has the same information we have, and the building department only has —” he said before being cut off by Van Vliet on a point of order from Ward 2 Coun. David McLeod.

“Yeah, I’m sure there is,” Chiocchio said of the point of order.

McLeod said Chiocchio was discussing a request for information in camera to assist residents’ understanding, and that was something he couldn’t do with in-camera information.

“The point of order (Chiocchio’s) is moot, and I’d like you to rule in such a way,” McLeod said.

Van Vliet agreed with McLeod and said he didn’t think the collapses should be discussed and that it was out of order.

“This council doesn’t have a right to know what happened, and the mayor and CAO aren’t here tonight? Are you kidding me?” Chiocchio replied.

Van Vliet said Mayor Frank Campion and chief administrative officer Steve Zorbas were both off dealing with family issues.

“I don’t think it’s even our right to question why they are off,” Van Vliet said.

Chiocchio said the press across Canada has been all over the collapses, and council doesn’t know what’s happening.

“That’s all I get to know,” he said.

Ward 3 Coun. Sharmila Setaram wanted to request moving in camera.

“There are questions I would like to ask, and I understand the questions may not be able to be responded to, but I would like to opportunity to ask so they

can be noted and, hopefully, when more information is available, they can be answered,” she said.

After Van Vliet said the in-camera meeting was cancelled, Setaram asked how councillors should send in questions regarding the structural damage at the site.

“Until the Ministry of Labour is finished its investigation, there will be no information coming from anybody until they decide to release some information,” he said.

Ward 4 Coun Bryan Green said he believed council could vote, with a two-thirds majority, to go in camera.

“If that’s a possibility, I motion we do that,” he said.

Stephens said councillors could put a motion forward, but the best practice is to discuss it with the mayor.

“As I outlined, there is no further information for staff to provide, therefore, there is no reason to hold a meeting in camera. As the chair also identified, currently the Ministry of Labour is investigating these matters so there is nothing further for staff to provide,” she said.

Green said an in-camera session would provide a forum for questions.

Van Vliet said he needed to identify the reason for going in camera, and Stephens added the councillor would need to identify what section of the Municipal Act under which it would fall.