

## Statements on Heiniu's death sparks political dialogue

A statement issued by Mayor Tom Mrakas following last week's fraught Council meeting at which the owners of Heiniu, a rottweiler that died during an Animal Control call in East Gwillimbury involving Aurora officers, had a chance to speak, raised questions on the campaign trail last week.

Following the May 26 meeting, during which participants in a peaceful protest demanding 'Truth for Heiniu' filled Council Chambers to press for a chance to speak at the podium, resulting in a 45-minute Council recess, Mayor Mrakas said 'emotions were understandably high, and unfortunately the meeting became disruptive to the point where Council was required to recess so everyone could calm down and allow for a rational discussion to continue.'

'During the recess, I met directly with a representative of the protest,' he said in the statement. 'We had a respectful conversation where we acknowledged the frustration and emotion surrounding this matter, but also the importance of maintaining order and following the proper process within Council Chambers. We agreed that once Council resumed, I would reiterate the Town's public statement, and I would invite Council to waive procedure to allow the owners to formally address Council and be officially added to the agenda.'

After he reiterated the statement, Mayor Mrakas said Council 'unanimously agreed to waive our Procedural Bylaw, and the owners were given the opportunity to directly address Council and share their concerns publicly.'

'I fully understand that many people want immediate answers and action,' he concluded. 'Everyone is deeply affected by the loss of a beloved family pet, and no one ever wants to see something like this happen. However, these types of matters require due process, proper review, and cooperation with the appropriate authorities. As for any potential criminal charges, that determination rests solely with the police and not with the Town.'

'The Town remains committed to completing an independent review process thoroughly and responsibly. The appropriate individuals will be contacted as part of this process and the public will be fully informed of the outcomes when the process is complete, and the information can legally be shared.'

The statement, however, raised more questions than answers for Ward 5 Councillor John Gallo, who is one of two candidates at the time challenging Mayor Mrakas for the Town's top job in this fall's municipal election.

In a separate statement, Councillor Gallo contented the statement was not an accurate account of what transpired at last week's Council meeting.

'I believe it is important to clarify several omissions and inaccuracies in the Mayor's public statement regarding the Council proceedings surrounding the tragic death of Heiniu,' said Councillor Gallo. 'Like many residents, I recognize emotions surrounding the matter are understandably high. The loss of a beloved family pet has deeply affected many members of the community, and residents came to Council seeking answers, accountability, and an opportunity to be heard.'

'The Mayor's statement suggests that he facilitated the process that allowed the family to speak. That is not an accurate reflection of what occurred. During the recess, I went directly to residents and supporters gathered in the lobby area to listen to their concerns, understand how the situation could be resolved, and work toward a respectful path forward. I remained engaged throughout the evening in an effort to de-escalate tensions and ensure the meeting could continue productively.'

'I then requested that Council waive the Procedural Bylaw to allow the family to formally address Council despite not being registered on the agenda. Council unanimously supported that request.'

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