

Pension defence tarnishes auditor

While \$104,000 top-up makes subjective sense, argument weakens watchdog's moral authority



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COMMENTARY

The city's embattled auditor general is finally speaking out in defence of the \$104,000 pension top-up he accepted last fall. While he won't talk about what councillors said behind closed doors before deciding to give him the six-figure

cheque, Alain Lalonde was willing to discuss the facts behind his request and his rationale for asking.

Lalonde has an argument to make, but it was an easy one to say no to. Councillors exercised poor judgment when they said yes, but

Lalonde put them in an awkward spot. After having his pension request refused by city manager Kent Kirkpatrick, Lalonde met individually with members of council's corporate-services committee to explain his argument. He says it wasn't lobbying, but since his point was that they should approve the payment, that's debatable.

Lalonde says his request for pension help was made in the context of the city being a large government organization with a history of generosity toward its employees.

"I work within that culture, that environment, that level of business. I don't think there is anything wrong with working within the context of where you are."

Put less diplomatically, what he's really saying is that as an employer, the city is a soft touch. Councillors' acceptance of his request proves that point.

When Lalonde joined the city in 2004, he was still on leave from the federal government and remained so until March 2006. Lalonde had a verbal agreement with Kirkpatrick that he could transfer his federal pension to Ontario's municipal employees' group pension plan.

See DENLEY on PAGE C4

