



Andy Wells was planning to hold on to his job as mayor of St. John's, at least until September, while serving as chairman and CEO of the Public Utilities Board (PUB). On Wednesday, Premier Danny Williams said he would wait until Wells resigned from city hall before allowing him to begin his appointment at the PUB. — Telegram file photo

Premier pushes Wells

Mayor now contemplating departure date

By TARA MULLOWNEY
THE TELEGRAM

Andy Wells says he just wants some peace and quiet for a change.

Speaking to The Telegram about his impending resignation, the normally outspoken mayor of St. John's said he needs some time to himself to decide when he'll leave city hall.

"Everybody should just leave me alone and I'll be making the call very soon," Wells said with a laugh.

Premier Danny Williams issued a news release Wednesday morning saying that although he believes Wells is capable of being mayor and chairman and CEO of the Public Utilities Board (PUB) at the same time, he will be waiting until Wells resigns as mayor before letting him start at the PUB.

Wells has been mayor of St. John's

since 1997 and was due to begin at the PUB March 1.

Since he announced last month that he would be doing both jobs at once, there has been controversy among taxpayers and at city hall, with councillors calling for his resignation — or at least a drastic cut in pay — and residents contacting the media and joining Facebook sites calling for him to give up the mayor's seat.

"This issue is taking away from the fact that Mayor Wells is an outstanding appointment as head of the PUB," Williams' news release said.

"Because this has become such a distraction for all involved, I have informed Mayor Wells that we will hold off on his official start date at the PUB until such time as he steps down as mayor.

"I expect this will happen sooner rather than later, but ultimately the

mayor will decide the exact day to end his current tenure with the city."

Wells was planning not to step down, at least until September, in an effort to avoid a byelection he said would cost the city \$400,000.

If he leaves after September, Deputy Mayor Dennis O'Keefe will assume the mayor's chair until the next municipal election, in September 2009.

Asked whose decision it was for him to resign, Wells said, "I think the (premier's media statement) is self-explanatory. He said, 'The starting date is up to you, but we think, given the controversy, that it would probably be better if you stepped down (as mayor).'"

"I cannot argue with that, and I'm not going to argue with that, absolutely not."

See JONES, page A2

Jones pleased with decision

... Continued from page A1

Liberal Leader Yvonne Jones had been calling for Wells to either resign as mayor or for Williams to set the terms of the PUB appointment that would force Wells to limit himself to one of the two jobs.

She said Wednesday she's pleased with the premier's decision, although she still doesn't think Wells is the best candidate for the PUB job.

"I certainly felt very strongly that him holding both those positions would have undermined the roles and responsibilities of the Public Utilities Board primarily," Jones told The Telegram, adding she feels Wells would not have been able to carry out his duties with the PUB in a non-biased, non-partisan way if he was still mayor of St. John's.

"I've never called Andy Wells' capabilities into question here when it comes to whether or not he has the ability to do both jobs. What I have called into question is the perceived and known conflicts that occur when you have someone in two high-profile positions like that," Jones said.

Wells said he's mulling over his options regarding his departure.

His annual PUB salary will be \$175,000, and he said he won't be looking for an increase in pay, even though his resignation from council means he'll be giving up a yearly salary of \$94,736 — one-third of which is tax-free.

"Oh no, that salary is set by the ordering council at \$175,000, and the most I probably would have carried on as mayor would have been until the end of September," Wells said.

He wouldn't offer an opinion on what kind of acting mayor O'Keefe would be, but endorsed Coun. Keith Coombs for the deputy mayor's position.

In the event that there is no byelection, the deputy mayor will be chosen by council.

O'Keefe told The Telegram he thinks he and Coombs would make "a pretty good team."

Coombs said he's interested in the deputy mayor's position and would retire as principal of Macdonald Drive Junior High School if he got the job.

"I've been a member of council for 14 years, and I haven't moved into a deputy mayor's position because while it's not deemed or mandated as a full-time position, I think I'd have to have a lot more flexibility than I have at the present time," he said. "Retirement would give me that flexibility."

Councillors Art Puddister, Frank Galgay and Shannie Duff have indicated their interest in the deputy mayor's seat, too, although Duff said she won't run in a byelection. Puddister said he won't run if Duff does — he'll support her instead.

Coun. Ron Ellsworth hasn't said what seat he's interested in, but has made no secret that he'd like to move up the council ladder.

The Telegram February 14, 2008

pg A1