

Police union draws mayor's ire

'Come clean' with complaints, Maddin says

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Mayor Jim Maddin challenged the Saskatoon Police Association to "come clean" about its problems with police Chief Russell Sabo, a few days after 90 per cent of union members indicated they have no confidence in the chief.

"I want public disclosure," a frustrated Maddin said Sunday in an interview, in which he also suggested the union wants the right to manage the police force and accused it of bitching and whining.

"The union has come forward in a very bold manner with this confidence vote publicly. I want to challenge them to stay public and identify their concerns and tell us why this board and this chief have failed them so miserably."

Maddin, who's also a member of the board of police commissioners, phoned The StarPhoenix with his concerns. He intends to write an open letter to the police association to be published in the newspaper.

Maddin said the right of management to run the police service has been eroded over time. He urged the association to be part of the solution, "not just bitches and whiners and complainers.

"If they want to be involved in the management of the police service, step up to the plate and participate with a little less aggression and a little less confrontation. I think maybe we would could get somewhere."

More than 84 per cent of the union's 380 members cast ballots in the confidence vote. Last Wednesday, the association revealed that 90 per cent voted no when asked if they had confidence in Sabo. Ninety-five per cent had no confidence in the board of police commissioners.

On Friday, Sabo, the police commission and the police association met and decided to ask a mediator to help settle their differences.

Association president Stan Goertzen said then that officers are unhappy with staffing levels, training, public safety, health issues and Sabo's management style. He also told reporters that police officers are relying more and more on prescription drugs as stress levels increase and morale plummets.

Maddin said the union should provide more detail about its concerns so the public can determine whether they are legitimate, even though Sabo, Goertzen and police commission chair Leanne Bellegarde Daniels agreed the issues would be treated as an internal matter.

The mayor accused some within the association of wanting to keep the police service under a cloud of darkness and suspicion. Goertzen could not be reached for comment Sunday.

The force has been rocked by publicity surrounding an unlawful confinement case which resulted in the convictions of two officers and charges of racism. In addition, Sabo only recently returned

to work after an investigation into sexual harassment allegations.

Maddin, who served 25 years on the force and retired as human resources superintendent, suggested opposition to Sabo is related to the fact the chief wants the police service to change how it does business. He is a strong proponent of community policing, a concept the union views with skepticism.

Maddin, who will seek a second term as mayor in the Oct. 22 civic election, said the police association has a long history of resisting change.

"I have an idea of the dynamics and I know some of the personalities involved," said the mayor.

"There have been a number of valuable programs that have been resisted and opposed by the police union, including community police stations, victim services, bike patrols, foot patrols, the utilization of special constables, aboriginal relations officers and the all-encompassing community policing."

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