

Meeting over controversial rural Manitoba silica sand project cut short after mayor calls police



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A special meeting of council in rural Manitoba over a controversial silica sand project came to an abrupt end after the mayor cut the meeting short and had the police called.

Councillors and residents in the RM of Springfield were at the government office Tuesday evening for a special meeting of council. The meeting was held for councillors to vote on a zoning by-law amendment regarding the Sio Silica corporation – a company looking to extract silica sand and process it at a new facility near Vivian, Man.

The proposed project has sparked backlash from residents who are opposed to the project.

Back in 2022, Springfield's council voted against a zoning amendment that would allow this type of activity.

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However, the company appealed to the municipal board, and on March 8, it ordered the rural municipality to amend the zoning by-law.

That was on the agenda Tuesday night – but council did not actually get that far.

The meeting, which CTV News was monitoring over Zoom, came to an abrupt end less than a half hour after it began, following a argument between Mayor Patrick Therrien and one of the attendees.

"Either you apologize or you leave," Therrien is heard saying in the meeting. "OK then, I'll phone the police then."

The mayor then adjourns the meeting, saying it was being cut short until the police arrive. The meeting did not resume Tuesday.

Tangi Bell, the president of Our Line in the Sand – a group of residents advocating against the project, was at the meeting Tuesday evening.

She said after the mayor ended the meeting, all the residents were told to leave. As she was leaving, Bell said three RCMP cars showed up.

Other residents CTV News spoke with also confirmed police were called to the meeting.

RCMP confirmed Wednesday that they were called to a report of a disturbance at the council meeting.

“Conflict had arisen over a matter under discussion at the meeting, but when police arrived, there was no disturbance as Council had removed themselves and the residents had quieted,” Tara Seel, media relations officer, wrote in an email. “Council was advised to adjourn the meeting and reconvene at a later date.”

Seel said there were no arrests made and no tickets were handed out. She said officers remained on scene to ensure no issues as residents left.

As for what happens now, Bell said residents have been left confused by the whole situation.

"The reason why everybody was there was so that we could speak that we could bring forward our concern on the Sio Silica sand processing facility," Bell told CTV News Thursday. "But that whole step of asking the people and meaningful public participation in democracy is being ignored."

CTV News reached out to Mayor Therrien and the CAO for the RM Tuesday evening, but has not yet heard back.

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The municipal office for the RM of Springfield is pictured on June 13, 2023. (Source: Dan Timmerman/CTV News Winnipeg)