Critic concerned about lack of documents

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Hanover School Board chair Dallas Wiebe said Barkman has been a great resource for the board and they have referred to him many times for advice on issues that were discussed between trustees.

Wiebe couldn't recall the recommendations made by Barkman that the board implemented and suggested *The Carillon* speak with former chair and current vice-chair Jeff Friesen.

Friesen wouldn't discuss or give examples of any recommendations that Barkman gave to the board.

Barkman will stay with the board and report to the minister's office as long as he is needed, according to both Altomare at the time and now Minister of Education Tracy Schmidt.

"This will be an ongoing process and we'll be in regular communication not only with Kelly Barkman, but also with the board," said Altomare at the time.

Walby sees the lack of reports as an indicator of two bad outcomes: either the person isn't doing their job, or the province is trying to "bluff their way out of disclosing records."

Schmidt said she meets daily with her deputy minister Mona Pandey who gets regular verbal updates from Kelly Barkman. How many times Barkman meets with Pandey was not disclosed.

"I've always felt very well apprised and well updated about the work of Mr. Barkman and the Hanover school division," Schmidt said.

When asked what changes or improvements the Hanover School Board has made since Barkman started being an advisor, Schmidt couldn't say.

Schmidt said trustees have told her they valued Barkman's expertise and recommendations for hiring practices. The minister didn't say what those specific recommendations were.

"I think that families should receive this as a welcomed sign from the government," she said.

Progressive Conservative education critic Wayne Ewasko called the lack of documents "crazy," "bizarre," and "odd."

He said it's concerning because if Barkman was supposed to advise Hanover School Division and report back to the education minister, there should be some form of correspondence available.

"How can a special advisor be appointed by the education minister…, be paid by the education minister and nothing with the name Kelly Barkman, provincial advisor to Hanover School Division, has any records," Ewasko said.

"What's going on?"

A provincial spokesperson for Schmidt told *The Carillon* Barkman earned $6,297 from when he started in August 2024 to Oct. 23 of this year.

Ewasko said the NDP government previously championed accountability and transparency in the education department and school boards, but lack of records is an example of them having neither.

"I think they're hiding something, if they're not writing something down," said Ewasko.

Under Ewasko's term as education minister when the PC government was in power, he said his government never appointed a special advisor. He said if they had they would have had some documentation.



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Opposition education critic MLA Wayne Ewasko said the lack of documentation regarding the reporting of special advisor Kelly Barkman to the education minister is odd and bizarre.

Meanwhile Schmidt said Barkman's position will be assessed and supported if it's a benefit for all parties involved. Schmidt said it's up to the school division to share Barkman's findings.

Wiebe said there have been no reports from Barkman made to the board. As to whether a final report from Barkman after his term is done will be shared with the public, Wiebe said the board will have to decide on that when the time comes. He said recommendations will not be shared.

Wiebe said the fact that Barkman is reporting verbally to the government is not a concern and that there being no reports from Barkman to the minister is a matter between the minister and Barkman.

"Verbal communication I think is OK."

The minister visited Hanover in September to open Parkhill School. Wiebe said the only thing discussed with the minister was growth in the division. He said the board has never met with Schmidt formally to discuss Barkman's findings and he doesn't know when the board will meet with Schmidt.



PAUL REIMER

Hanover School Division board chair Dallas Wiebe said he sees no problems with verbal reporting from special advisor Kelly Barkman to the province.

