

The lost is found

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Julian Renaud applied for a referral for right to information and protection of privacy act to gain access to a studied on the City of Fredericton's fire department locations. After the Court of Queen's Bench set a hearing date, the city handed over the 12-year-old study and made it public.

Photo: James West/The Daily Gleaner

Oh, City of Fredericton, why do you get yourself in such silly messes?

This one involves a 12-year-old fire station location study that mysteriously went missing. It suddenly materialized this week after a court date to force its appearance was set for July 3.

When we've asked for a copy of that study, the city has always told us it lost all its copies. That means the fire chief, the deputy fire chief, the mayor, the deputy mayor, the members of the public safety committee, the clerk and so on all lost their copies in a series of bizarre, coincidental incidents.

Then private citizen Julian Renaud asked for it as well. He was writing a story about the relationship between the firefighters union and the city and felt that the study would be good research.

The missing study has always been a thorn in the side of some in the firefighters union, who do not believe the Two Nations fire station should have been built high on the north side, and they suspected the study might warn against that.

When the city wouldn't give him a copy - the mayor refused to ask the author and consultant, Tom Powell, to supply a fresh copy to city hall - Mr. Renaud decided to take the city to court.

A few days ago, the Court of Queen's Bench set the hearing date, and voila! The city produced a copy and even posted the whole thing on its website.

Mr. Powell, a former Fredericton fire chief, always had a copy in his files, and that's where the city says it got the new one. But it could have gotten a copy years ago - and given one to us - if it had wanted to.

It took the threat of a lawsuit to pry it from city hall.

While the 2002 study does not warn against building a fire station where it now sits, it does say the city should build one on Gibson Street.

You may recall that the mayor and Mr. Renaud go way back - to the 2011 Occupy Fredericton movement that saw the mayor order the demolition of the site under the authority of a bylaw that did not exist.

Three Occupy members took the city to court, and as the court date neared, the city sought a settlement that ended up costing it \$14,350 in a payout to Mr. Renaud and two others.

Even though morally, many supported the city's demolition, it lacked legal merit, and the city ended up looking, well, sheepish and unprofessional.

Now after Round 2, the city is pretty much looking the same way.