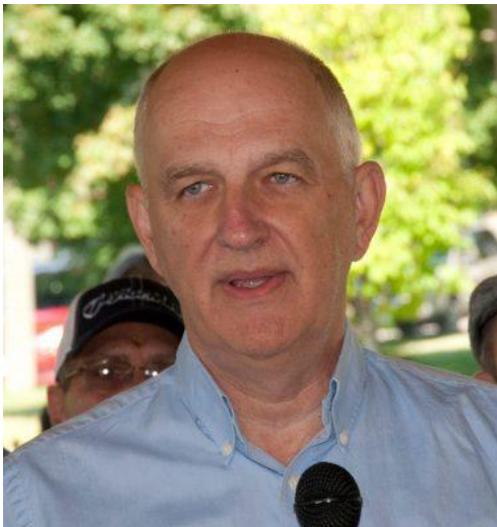


CTA complaint supported by Ombudsman – Cobourg News Blog

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On May 4, 2018, four members of the Cobourg Taxpayers Association (CTA) attempted to attend a Parks and Recreation Advisory Steering Committee meeting but were refused by Director Dean Hustwick. He was supported by the Municipal Clerk and Mayor Gil Brocanier who insisted the meeting was not open to the public. Then at a council meeting on 4 June 2018, Dennis Nabieszko of the Cobourg Taxpayers Association – backed by Debra McCarthy – asked why steering committee meetings for the waterfront study were not public. Dean Hustwick said that the steering committee was not an advisory group and not public. In fact, the “steering committee” role was assigned to the Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee whose meetings are generally open to the public.



Dennis Nabieszko

Not content with Dean’s response nor the Town’s response to written requests for an explanation, the CTA took their concern to the Town of Cobourg Ombudsman. The resulting report was presented to Council at last night’s Special Council meeting, and the Ombudsman supported the CTA because the Town pledged public engagement for this project. (At right is a file photo of Dennis Nabieszko, secretary of the CTA.)

Concerns raised by CTA

1. The Parks and Recreation Advisory Steering Committee failed to provide agendas, minutes, and times, dates or locations of the meetings to the public.

2. Meetings of the Parks and Recreation Advisory Steering Committee were not open to the public.
3. The Town of Cobourg did not respond to complaints about the Parks and Recreation Advisory Steering Committee Meetings not being open to the public.

The report by M. John Ewart, Ombudsman, concluded that:

- The Parks and Recreation Advisory Steering Committee is not a "Committee of Council" as outlined in Section 238 of the Act, as only one of the five members are also members of Council but may still be a committee of council if it meets the definition contained in the municipality's own procedural by-law. The relevant Motion 343-16 specifically directs the Committee to engage the public.
- Therefore "the agendas, minutes and times, dates or locations of Parks and Recreation Advisory Steering Committee meetings are to be available to any member of the public when requested."
- For concern #3, on May 4 the Town did respond to an initial letter by the CTA on May 3 but did not respond to a follow-up formal complaint on May 10. The Town believed their response on May 4 was sufficient but failed to say that to the CTA. The ombudsman said that "for purposes of clarity it would have been of assistance to advise" the CTA that their first response was sufficient.

At the Council meeting, Brian Darling, who was on the Steering Committee, said that contrary to his understanding of the required process, no staff were interviewed by the Ombudsman and that the Town was not given an opportunity to respond. He therefore asked that the Ombudsman provide clarification on the process. Brian obviously did not agree with the findings. Dean Hustwick also disputed the findings and said that there were many other opportunities for Public Engagement.

Debra McCarthy said that she thought all meetings were open and that this issue is "about trust".

Suzanne Séguin said that the public needs to be involved and does need to hear what is said.

John Henderson said that he along with Suzanne and others are working to "reframe procedures" for the new council. He also mentioned that there would be a Strategic Planning Session in February.

Council voted to refer the Ombudsman's report to staff for a report to be presented at a meeting of the new council in January.

See also the Press Release by the CTA giving their view ([link below](#)). Two members of the CTA were spotted in the gallery – including Dennis Nabieszko (now sporting a beard!)