



Cobourg Taxpayers Association

Making Local Government Accountable

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***In Search of the True Numbers
The Public's Need for Transparency
and Accountability***

**CTA's Analysis of
CAO Stephen Peacock's Report
Parks and Recreation Staffing Levels
Lydia Smith's September 1st Letter**

Remarks By
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Town of Cobourg Council
October 26, 2015 Meeting

Check Against Delivery

Good evening Mayor Brocanier, members of Council, the media and the public gallery.

This evening, the Cobourg Taxpayers Association will be reviewing its' analysis of the report by CAO Stephen Peacock in response to Lydia Smith's letter of September 1st regarding Parks and Recreation staffing levels.

Unfortunately, the conclusion of our analysis is that Mr. Peacock's report raises more questions than it provides answers.

However, what it does do is vindicate Ms. Smith from the Mayor's unfounded statement at the September 15th Council meeting that the numbers used in her letter contained "so much erroneous information". Mr. Peacock acknowledges that the numbers she used reflect the numbers used in the Financial Information Return (FIR) the municipality is required to file with the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

While he goes on to discuss staffing levels in the three departments (Parks, Arenas and Marina) in the Parks and Recreation functions under the direct control of the Corporation for the years, 2010, 2012 and 2014, we note the following:

- His report does not address the increase in employee costs (salaries, wages and benefits) for the Town of Cobourg between 2010 and 2014, which were part of Ms. Smith's September 1st letter and which were taken from the FIR. We have to assume by his silence on this aspect of her letter that the employee cost increases were correct.
- Nowhere does he attempt to reconcile the numbers he provided as being the Parks and Recreation functions with those in the FIR.
- He states that Schedule 80 of the FIR, which was used by Ms. Smith for the staffing numbers, reflects generalizations due to the varied corporate structures, municipality size, level of service provided and location of municipalities across the province. However, he does not explain how the numbers that the Town submitted to the Ministry were arrived at and specifically what they represent.
- His numbers are broken down as Full-Time and Part-Time and do not include the "Seasonal" category contained in the FIR. This complicates any meaningful comparison to a response recently received in a separate Freedom of Information Request where the number of CCC staff were reported as 13 Full-Time, 2 Part-Time and 13 Seasonal.
- The FIR reports there are Full-Time and Seasonal but no Part-Time employees, while the numbers shown in his report indicate there are 41 Part-Time employees.
- His numbers exclude "incidental" hires under three weeks. Does the FIR do likewise? What do the incidental hires total in terms of Full-Time Equivalents or FTEs?
- The CCC's Senior's position is said to be funded through provincial programs but there appears to be no readily identifiable, corresponding Revenue item in the

Operating Budget. In any event, the fundamental issue at hand is the number of staff and not how they are funded.

- In response to a question put to Mr. Peacock by one of our Advisory Committee members prior to last year's municipal election regarding total staffing numbers for the Town, it's interesting that the information in his reply was broken down between Full-Time, Part-Time and Casual/Summer and the source quoted was the FIR. His reply also provided the following explanation of the three categories.
 - Full time. Are all unionized and un-unionized (management) staff.
 - Part time. These numbers include our volunteer fire fighters which make up a large part of the number. By union definition part-time can range from 1 to a cap of 24 hours per week.
 - Casual. Include summer students that are restricted by union agreement to the summer months only. This category also include temporary non reoccurring staff that cannot be in place longer than 6 months (again a union negotiated definition). This category would also cover any maternity leaves, backfills due to sickness, etc.

Mr. Peacock attempts to blunt the cost of increased service levels by comparing the "overall" tax rate increases in Cobourg with the Ontario Consumer Price Index.

The tax increases that Mr. Peacock shows as being "overall" (his words) tax rate increases" are disingenuous.

The percentage increases he uses (e.g. 2.1% in 2014) are what the budget documents refer to as "Impact on Prior Existing Assessment" and not the "Total General Purpose Municipal Levy" increase of 3.23%. The difference of 1.1% is what the Town likes to refer to as "Impact of New Assessment Growth".

Putting aside the political spin, the fact of the matter is, no matter how one slices or dices it, overall municipal property taxes for general purposes according to the FIR and the Town's budget documents increased by 5.06% in 2011; 3.36% in 2012; 4.22% in 2013; and 3.23% in 2014.

In the same four year period, municipal property taxes have increased since 2010 by almost \$3 million or 16.8% and not the 7.4% alluded to using Mr. Peacock's numbers. In each year, the percentage increase in municipal taxes well exceeds the Ontario CPI.

The FIR is the main data collection tool used by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH) to collect financial and statistical information on municipalities. The Ministry has announced 15 winners of the FIR Awards. These municipalities are being recognized for their efforts and contribution in ensuring that timely, reliable, and accurate financial information was submitted for the 2014 Financial Information Return. The Town of Cobourg wasn't one of the winners.

In hindsight, I'm sure that Mayor Brocanier now regrets his poor choice of words at the September 15th Council meeting when he stated unequivocally that the information Ms. Smith used was erroneous. Nobody from the public should be accused of providing erroneous information when the data in question was what the Town reported in a statutory return to the provincial government. It's the Mayor's decision as to whether an apology to Ms. Smith is in order.

What this exercise has demonstrated is why the current financial reporting and budget presentation does not satisfy the public's need for transparency and accountability at Town Hall. If citizens can't rely on information reported by their municipality to the provincial government as being accurate or if they are only getting selective, self-serving information from those in charge, who or what can they trust?

The Cobourg Taxpayers Association does not want to be confrontational. All we ask is that our local municipal government be accountable and publicly report accurate and straightforward numbers and information that taxpayers expect and deserve to be given.