

Delegation to Town of Cobourg by Lydia Smith
May 19, 2015

Your worship, members of council, the press and the gallery – thank you for giving me this opportunity to speak to you today about the Park Theatre.

My name is Lydia Smith. I am a resident of Cobourg and I have been in sales and marketing for over 35 years. 17 of them as a business owner and entrepreneur.

I am here today because I love Cobourg – as do all of you.

I am sympathetic to the Park Theatre Group. I have had the pleasure of getting to know a number of the members and I believe that many of them are visionary and savvy business people who passionately want our town to thrive.

I am speaking here today because I object to the way in which all of this was done.

Perception is extremely important. It has the power to help or to hinder.

In this case, I found out last Monday night, that 3 months ago, a meeting took place, with a special interest group, behind closed doors. As a result of that meeting, 6 members of our town council decided to spend HALF a MILLION of our tax dollars. Yes, I know it is coming out of Holdco – and let's leave that whole issue for discussion another time. Ironically, Councillor McCarthy, co-ordinator for Arts and Culture was the only one who voted against this project.

I have many concerns. In the interest of keeping my talk short, I will only mention 3 of them:

1. PTG has not put forth any kind of visible plan. Why not? My understanding is that there has been talk of this for perhaps a couple of years anyway. Even if not, they have had 90 days since Feb. 17th to present at minimum a Vision Statement, a Mission statement and a bare bones skeleton of a business plan.
2. This Town Council has not put forth any kind of visible plan either for the alternative possibility that PTG does not succeed. Why not? It boggles my mind that you think it is OK to authorize an expenditure of Half a Million dollars, wherever it is coming from, without a PLAN!
3. This Council spent several days hammering out a strategic plan. A strategic plan is a tool designed to ensure disciplined effort. It calls for a certain order and pattern to keep it focused and productive. The process raises a sequence of questions that helps planners examine experience, test assumptions, gather and incorporate information about the present, and anticipate the environment in which the organization will be working in the future. Where is any of that evidence in this action? Your own plan calls for “developing a cultural master plan” and “developing a policy on the Town’s financial support for arts, culture and heritage”. How does this action fit in with that?

In closing, I want to remind council that almost half of you are new. I infer that to mean that the people of Cobourg wanted a change.

Until now, I thought we had that change. I have been very happy and optimistic about the changes I have seen to date: opening up the strategic plan, Mayor Brocanier supporting regular Cogeco

broadcasts because he has “heard that that is what the people of Cobourg want”, respectful communication in Council, etc.

This misguided action looks like a fall back to the old boys’ network and more back room deals with special interest groups.

I don’t believe that any of you intended that. Unfortunately, your ill-considered actions appear to have divided the town.

None of us need or want any more of that. Times are tough for many.

You had an opportunity here to bring hope to the Town. You could, perhaps, have united us under a common vision.

What a wasted opportunity. It just makes me really sad.

Thank you.