
OPINION COLUMN

GUEST COLUMN: COBOURG TAXPAYERS ASSOCIATION

Are Cobourg taxpayers really apathetic?

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Victoria Hall in downtown Cobourg

We often hear that today's citizens are not "engaged." That they are more interested in family, jobs and sport than in politics. That few bother to vote. That younger citizens, the millennials, are the worst. What is really the problem? Looking at recent events in Cobourg makes the problem obvious - it is our politicians.

There has been considerable discussion regarding having a question and answer opportunity at each Cobourg council meeting. For councillors who lament the lack of interest among citizens you would think that they would welcome the opportunity to engage with the taxpayers of Cobourg - the ones who pay the bills. But no, at the merest suggestion of Q&A, Councillor McCarthy launched into a six-minute rant at a recent council meeting. She claimed that having Q&A would waste councillors' valuable time and might even result

in councillors engaging with citizens regarding the best approach to a particular issue. Mayor Brocanier then lectured that "the best legal minds" (unnamed) thought that Q&A was a horrible idea and should not be tolerated. To remove all doubt, Councillors Rowden and Darling confirmed that they agreed with McCarthy and Brocanier. With four of seven members of council openly afraid of citizen questions there is no hope for engagement before the next election.

A proposed zoning change for the benefit of the mayor's niece-in-law recently came before council. A millennial resident delivered a well-researched delegation to council regarding the zoning change. This is exactly what an engaged resident should do and you would think that her eloquently presented concerns would be welcomed. No, she was insulted by Mayor Brocanier who claimed that he "knew far more about the Ontario Municipal Act than she ever would." Unusual? No, just business as usual for Mayor Brocanier!

Cobourg council allocated \$160,000 to hire a consultant to engage residents and develop a plan for the waterfront. There were dozens of meetings with stakeholders. There were presentations of possible ideas. There were design charrettes attended by over 100 residents to flesh out the plans. Almost 2,000 residents completed a lengthy online survey. That sounds like a perfect example of an engaged community working together. Unfortunately, when the preliminary report was presented the consultants gave only a 15% weight to citizen input. That means that the vast majority of the plan was based on the wishes of politicians and town staff rather than residents!

What is the solution? Replacing our politicians and town staff who ignore Cobourg citizens who pay their salaries would be a huge step in the right direction.

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