

Good afternoon Mayor Henderson, Council, members of the media, and members of the public.

My name is Dennis Nabieszko and I live on Hudson Street in Cobourg.

I am encouraged with this new Council focusing on public engagement and I am still concerned that even with extensive public engagement, citizens still feel that they are not being listened to and feel a distrust with public engagement.

The way this strategic plan has been managed is a good example. It has been brought to the public only after Council has put their stamp on it. It is now extremely difficult for us, the public, to add any feedback without appearing to criticize the hard work that Council has put into it.

The waterfront plan was another example where citizens did not feel they were properly heard during the public engagement process or the public meetings. After the final Waterfront report was issued and came before Council, there were still twelve delegations criticizing the report and asking for a delay because they felt the public had not been heard.

It is time for Council to move beyond “public engagement” to “collaborating with citizens” and to do so at the beginning of the process and not near the end.

Collaboration is defined as being active members of a group working together to achieve a common goal. Being an active member means, you add your contribution to the group and produce or create something together.

Collaboration means that all participants take ownership in what is produced. In order to feel ownership, the public input needs to be solicited at the initial stages of a project to provide Councillors with the feedback of what citizens are thinking and looking for. Doing it at this early stage gives Councillors an opportunity to re-build trust with the public by showing them that their views have been heard and taken into consideration.

Currently, most of the public engagement through surveys, public feedback, and public meetings takes place after all of the discussions have taken place and draft reports have been issued. The public is then asked to comment on something that is almost complete. No one wants to significantly change something that a great amount of time has already been spent preparing. I ask you to think about how much of the public input is really taken into account when the final report is prepared and issued by staff. How will the almost 40 emails sent in by citizens and attached to the agenda, and all of the verbal submissions you will hear today be considered before the final report is issued? Will Council truly give this feedback the attention it deserves or be selective in what they choose to address in the limited time you have to discuss all of the feedback?

It is time to collaborate with citizens and listen to them and have them feel that they have been truly heard and their input taken into consideration.

It is time to rebuild the trust with citizens.

“**Collaboration with Citizens**” needs to be a pillar of this strategic plan as it affects all areas of the strategic plan.

Thank you for listening.