

April 8, 2019

To: Cobourg Town Council
Public Meeting Regarding February 22nd Draft 2019-2022 Strategic Plan

Re: Suggested changes, additions to Draft Strategic Plan

I believe what I have to offer will enhance the goals of the Strategic Plan and make achieving them more certain. My comments are mostly general and I will leave it to others to find the right wording ... if indeed they are appropriate and worthy of being included in the Plan.

- A) The Strategic Plan should put a stronger emphasis on making known at every opportunity, to residents and visitors alike, the fascinating *history* of Cobourg, and along with other initiatives use this information to create a unique image of Cobourg as it works to achieve its Vision.

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Modify the Vision to read:

"Cobourg is a vibrant and inclusive community that works to provide a high quality-of-life for all and a well earned image of itself as a unique and historic place."

(Comment: ... by having as its subject "the community", it is implied that the responsibility for achieving the Vision is not only that of local government but also that of citizens-at-large through their active involvement in their community and with each other.)

Two small examples of how to promote that sense of Cobourg as an historic place:

a) Create a Tag line:

"Honoring our past; embracing our future."

b) Include the following wording beneath the town crest:

"Settled 1798
Incorporated 1837"

(Comment ... The heritage of the Town is referred to in the following three sections of the Draft Plan. In my opinion this supports my recommendation that a reference to the town's heritage be included in a simplified Vision Statement as proposed above)

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Under Pillars/Objectives: "*The town protects, preserves and promotes its ... **heritage** ...*"

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In Places, Strategic Actions: "*Investigate the creation of additional **heritage districts** ...*"

" Desired Outcomes: "*Arts, culture and **heritage** are key defining characteristics of the Cobourg community.*"

- B) A number of presenters at the April 8 Public Meeting expressed concern over the lack of opportunity for the public into be involved in the early stages of the policy making and decision making process. While it is the responsibility of the elected to make the final decisions, it is the responsibility of the electorate to ensure the elected are fully informed.

It is my belief following a life-long interest in local government and after running for council in London, Cobourg and Annapolis Maryland, that a successful representative democracy depends on a constructive and active partnership between the elected and the electorate.

Council alone cannot succeed in bringing about necessary change despite Provincial Policy statements, good advisory committees, and a highly competent bureaucracy and administration, unless the Public feels involved and is satisfied that Council has listened

i) **Where the concept of partnerships is referred to in the Plan it should be made clear that this also includes partnerships between the elected government and the electorate.** This is all the more important considering the growth of cynicism about government ("they never listen!") and the increase in the percentage of the electorate who do not bother to vote.

More could be done to open Council to the Public "" and the Public to Council:

ii) **On appropriate issues and before policies are set or specific action decided, hold a Public Forum** which consists of several well advertized public meetings held on different days and at different times. Clearly define the issue under consideration and invite the Public to state their views. Each presenter to have a limited time, say one minute, to make their contribution. The benefit of doing this in public rather than over the internet is that citizens will hear from each other as well as have Council hear from them.

After the first round of meetings are over break the submissions into groups or categories and hold a second round of public meetings on each to begin hearing possible actions or solutions. At this point Council will have heard from the electorate and be in a position to put together several options, decide on a final draft and hold a final public meeting. Two examples follow.

Eg 1: What does Sustainability mean to you and how will we know when we have achieved a Sustainable Cobourg?

Eg 2: Do you feel that Cobourg Town Council listens to you and your concerns? If not what can be done to improve communication between you and your Town Council?

iii) **Hold an old fashioned day-long Town Hall Meeting once a year**, on a Saturday in the Spring, at the Library or Community Centre, with no agenda other than to simply hear from the electorate. Again presentations limited in length to one to one and a half minutes. The meeting could include a referendum on a particular issue, sandwiches at noon sold by local charities, tables set up by not-for-profit groups to inform and recruit, and by political parties. I lived in the small town of Bristol, Vermont, for many years and this was a community event that everyone looked forward to every Spring. Children and dogs were allowed ..

iv) **When delegations are made before Council on issues that involve a proponent and an opponent, the present format allows the opponents to go first followed by the proponents ... then Council asks questions and a final vote is taken.** I have been present on three occasions over the last 20 years when the proponent's presentation contained either serious misinformation (I hesitate to use the word "lies") or offered incomplete information on purpose ... and there was no way to respond before Councillors began to ask questions and then vote. **My suggestion is that on these occasions there should be an opportunity for rebuttal;** that the opponent be given one and a half minutes to respond to the proponent, followed by a one and a half minute final statement from the proponent. At that point Councillors would be much better informed and in a position to ask more insightful questions.

Thank you for this opportunity to express my views.

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