

## One pager on the ways we govern Cobourg

After the municipal election of 1985, the new Mayor, frustrated by the perception that previous councils had stalled the movement of agendas by slow committees, was determined to 'run Council like a business'. Seeing the committee system as non-responsive and an impediment to fast decision making he pushed for, and Council approved 'the coordinator system'. The committees were abolished and each of the eight other members of Council were assigned areas of responsibilities - portfolios. An information matrix was devised and all Staff/Council contact and information was pushed through the coordinators.

This system has now been in operation for nearly thirty years and never been reviewed properly and examined against other ways of doing things. Admittedly the system has been tweaked from time to time but never improved and in fact has become institutionalised into information silos.

One of the major complaints from Councillors has been the problem of access to information other than the information inside their portfolios. Elected at large to be Councillors who should be approachable and answer to all the citizens, it is a frustration to tell somebody with a problem, "I cannot handle that for you. I, or you, must speak to the Councillor in charge." Another is that one Councillor does not know what other Councillors are doing leading to duplication and suspicion of overstepping boundaries.

Having watched and participated in Council activities for nearly thirty years I see uninformed Councillors at every meeting asking question to glean information that should have been shared. I see information at Council being brought forward for the first time and then a vote being called on it. In a world where the problem is usually too much information these situations should be eliminated. Cobourg is unique in this rigid system of Council administration. Perhaps another system is the answer.

### One Answer

The County of Northumberland eliminated their standing committees a few years ago and all Councillors sit on all committees as Committees of the Whole. Business arising from those committees area are resolved at a regular Council meeting once a month. Nobody feels left out and all the members have all the information and Regular meetings have become a formality to pass legislation.

This model should be adopted by Cobourg. The new procedure in Cobourg would be:

Establish three standing committees

- Planning
- Operations
- Finance

Each committee would be composed of all of the members of Council, and held weekly. Each Committee would be chaired by the Deputy Mayor. Robert's Rules of Order specifically recommends that the Mayor not chair committee meetings, Mayors of Cobourg have ignored this recommendation since 1985.

A Regular Council meeting, chaired by the Mayor, would be held every four weeks to ratify the motions proposed in the committee meetings. Urgent Council business could be legislated by special Council meetings during the hiatus, just as it is done now. No business would be held up by having a Regular meeting only once every four weeks.

The Advantages to this change:

**Cost savings** - not all members of Staff would have to attend every Council meeting as they do now.

**Information sharing** - all members of Council would all share the same information.

**More in-depth study of items** that affect the Town would occur, as specific topics would be discussed in specific committee meetings.

**Council assumes more control and leadership** as more time devoted to specific items would mean less Staff delegation.