

Stakeholder Response April 21, 2015

Council Chambers, Victoria Hall

The Advisory Committee on Natural Spaces of the **Willow Beach Field Naturalists** (WBFN)

I shall begin **reluctantly** with a **brief** restatement of the value for birds and wildlife of the Cobourg Heritage Harbour - and its open water west of the Centre Pier.

Lake Ontario attracts huge numbers of birds, especially wintering waterfowl and species using it as a highway twice a year in migration. Crucially, many of these species need **sheltered waters**, especially in bad weather. Cobourg Harbour, it must be stressed, is the only suitably extensive area of sheltered water between Presqu'ile and Oshawa, a distance of almost 100 km. of Great Lakes shoreline.

Everyone in Cobourg knows our large, much-loved, resident population of Mallard Ducks and Canada Geese. But in fact over the last 65 years [since 1948] an astonishing 268 bird species have been recorded around the harbour [75,972 bird records].

In fall, winter and spring, the rich mix of **ducks and geese** can include many rarities.

In winter, Cobourg is one of the best spots in Ontario to see **gulls**. When the water is frozen, huge numbers of gulls often concentrate on the ice west of the centre pier to rest and loiter. These flocks can number thousands of birds. Over the years we have recorded a total of 15 gull species, some extremely rare.

MAKE NO MISTAKE: reduction of available open water in the harbour, and the massive dredging that will be necessary to sustain the proposed expansion, will have a profound, year-round, adverse effect upon **all natural aspects of the harbour**, particularly the bird life.

That is why we oppose boat slips west of the Centre Pier. We consider the amazing natural diversity of this ecologically sensitive area more important than yacht traffic.

Why have I given only a **brief** overview, and why **reluctantly?** **Brief**, because we have made the naturalists' case **in detail many times** already, both in writing to the Parks Committee and orally to the Council. A detailed 52-page report was given to Shoreplan Engineering. The Parks Committee, the whole Council, and Shoreplan Engineering have all been made well aware of the naturalists' point of view.

Yet, nowhere in the report is there any mention of birds and wildlife or even a suggestion of any environmental assessment.

Contrary to the mayor's repeated advice, **no attempt was made at compromise.**

No concessions of any kind were made to the overwhelming issue of conservation in the Final Draft Report.

All 5 options still place the 116/120 permanent-slip expansion in the open water west of the Centre Pier – and indeed **everything we have had to say fell on deaf ears.**

No attempt was made to refute or even acknowledge our detailed statistics and reports.

In short, our views were simply ignored utterly, sent to the Black Hole of Calcutta.

Reluctantly, because we feel we are being asked to respond to a report deeply flawed in its very origin and based on the wrong premises.

Consider the **RFP** sent out for tenders for a harbour plan. **No** stakeholders, other than the Marina, were consulted or allowed any input whatsoever into the RFP (Request for Proposal) - **in spite of the fact that tax-payers funded this report up front.**

Indeed, the RFP was kept a strict secret. We were repeatedly refused access to it- and eventually were able to obtain it only by

paying for it under the Access to Information Act. Once we received it, we realized why it had been kept from us.

The RFP, requested by The Corporation of the Town of Cobourg and called "March 02-14 Marina Expansion, Phase II & III RFP Form of Proposal," asked the applicants to supply a "**Marina Master Plan Report.**"

Had any of the other stakeholders or the public been involved, it would have been pointed out that what was needed was a Harbour Development study, which would include a study of the **feasibility** and **desirability** of Marina expansion.

This was what we, and the mayor and Council, expected.

Instead, **in the words of Stan Frost:** "The report by the consultant is little more than a regurgitation of the initial proposal and does not address the real impact of an expansion of this size and the acceptability by the citizens of this community." (April 4, 2015 Comments to the Mayor and Councillors).

A more inclusive Steering Committee would have insisted that a study of the **environmental impact** of any Marina Expansion had to be part of the plan. We suggested this to no avail in our Feb 12, 2014 memo to Mayor and Council.

The Marina Expansion Plan ignores the fact that the area under consideration, both shoreline and adjacent land, is under Environmental Constraint in the OP which expressly forbids such development.

The Marina Expansion Plan totally contravenes the highly democratic PMP, on which we spent \$70,000 and which expressly rules out Marina Expansion into the West Harbour.

The Marina Expansion Plan utterly ignores the views of the public expressed at the famous July 2014 meeting.

The Marina Expansion Plan claims that "The Town wishes to expand the capacity of Cobourg Marina to 340 slips" (p. 8). This is **untrue at best** and deliberately presents a false picture.

The people of Cobourg want and deserve something better and greener.

They want our small west harbour to remain one of multi-use: for walkers, photographers, artists, naturalists, kayakers, canoeists, dragon-boaters and those many, year-round folk who appreciate the harbour as a serene spot to sit, drink one's coffee, and contemplate nature. This is not compatible with the proposed expansion of boat slips, parking, and boat storage. How did we get into this dilemma?

The **Marina Expansion Proposal Steering Committee** (Theresa Rickerby, Bill Watson, Rob Franklin, Julie Behan-Jones, Gina Brouwer, and Paul Gauthier) did not include a single stakeholder on it other than the Marina Manager himself. And one of the other 5 members was the staff-person who signed off on the original expansion proposal known as the "non-plan."

The fox, as usual, was firmly in charge of the henhouse.

Why were none of the stakeholders represented on the Committee??

Why, in particular, was the public not represented?

It is futile to keep referring things like Bill and Lorrie Wensely's presentation to Council back to such a lop-sided committee of unelected, pro-expansion civil servants. Note that this expansion is not being driven by the mayor and Council. We have lost faith in this Steering Committee and **cannot work with it**.

2 SUGGESTIONS:

1. Since the whole report is based on expansion west of the Centre Pier (Chapter 3: pages 8-26 of a 35-page report) – **it should be shelved**. We naturalists feel we should not be participating in any futile exercise discussing expanded parking, paving over of grass areas, winter boat storage in front of the condos, etc. First, slay the elephant in the room – then get on with it.

2. We suggest that Council form a **new, democratic Steering Committee**, so that a quick start can be made at discussing the real problems at hand – the East Pier, Marina improvement in its existing

footprint, and the West Headland. [see attachment retrieved from the Black Hole of Calcutta]

We have every faith that the Council can and will set us on the right track.