

Cobourg waterfront plans include creating a district

By Cecilia Nasmith, Northumberland Today
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Cobourg council has made a decision to make the Cobourg waterfront a formal district. File photo

COBOURG - Cobourg's recreation and culture division announces a project for the waterfront that will assess user needs and develop and implement a comprehensive waterfront design.

The announcement promised an inclusive community engagement process (as per the detailed Community Engagement Strategy presented to council this week) and a final plan that balances community use and natural-heritage consideration with visitor-related economic objectives.

This encompasses everything from parking to special events, director of parks, recreation, culture and tourism Dean Hustwick said at a media availability scheduled in conjunction with the announcement.

"It's important for both residents and visitors that the focus of this study is going to be on uses as well as services and revenue generation — all the types of things that are important to the community."

"The plan will include Cobourg harbour, Cobourg beach and Victoria Park as well as Peace Park, Donegan Park, Lucas Point Park and other waterfront areas," the announcement listed.

Due to the long-term nature of the impact this project will have, Hustwick said the town has elected to utilize the expertise and community involvement of its parks-and-recreation advisory committee to serve as the steering committee.

All parties at the press event were enthusiastic about the project, noting key elements that promise outstanding outcomes.

Parks-and-recreation advisory committee spokesman Paul Allen said that a key consideration going forward is that the town has designated a waterfront district. Now, instead of worrying about issues with the marina, trailer park or other aspect in isolation, planning and policy will revolve around how the district will work together, and in concert with the town.

"It's a district, to be dealt with holistically," Hustwick agreed.

"Obviously, it's a key asset to the community, but we are going to look at the whole waterfront as a cohesive area within town."

Cobourg has undertaken waterfront plans and commissioned waterfront studies for several decades, and the agreement is that these can be a base to build on.

"What's important is, there has been a lot of work done in the past, a lot of public engagement related to some of those studies. We believe we don't want to ignore all that work, because of lot of it was very insightful and there has been a lot of detail," Hustwick said.

"We will be reviewing everything that has been done in the past and use that to inform this process and utilize as much of the work that has been done previously — not starting from scratch. A lot of money and effort was expended previously, and we want to use as much as we can."

One big improvement they will be ringing on past projects is the implementation-and-costing aspect, Councillor Brian Darling said.

"The other plans were just plans to look at — what would you like to do. We will try to come up with detailed implementation planning and costing projections over the next years and decades so, during budget deliberations, there's some sort of idea where we are going.

"The waterfront is a unique asset to local user groups and users as well as an economic driver for the town. The plan will address the need of the community now, and will guide decision making regarding development improvements and enhancements over the long term."

The best success will result from the widest consultation, all agree.

"We want the public to be engaged, not just a few people or groups," Darling said.

"We need a majority of our citizens to come out and express their points, so everything comes to the forefront and we can do our best to see what's possible."

"Public engagement is central to the process, encouraging everyone to get involved as much as they can," Hustwick stated.

"The engagement opportunities throughout this process are central to the entire project and critical to the success of this project — the multiple open houses, the design charrette, individual meetings with community groups, surveys for individuals and groups. We are trying to involve everyone across the spectrum with opportunities to become involved.

"This is an exciting process where people can really bring to the table ideas on the future of the community and how the waterfront can be developed in future years to be sure this becomes an even more central tourism destination within the province."

All at the table had experiences with the impression the waterfront makes on behalf of the town. Manager of parks Teresa Behan had heard compliments at a Communities In Bloom conference. Darling often encounters visitors taking photographs of the beach to show their friends back home. Almost all can recall talking to someone whose first experience of the town was the waterfront — who later moved or retired to this area at least partly because of that.

"This is an opportunity to look at it from a tourism perspective, but also from a resident's perspective," Hustwick said.

"This is a major draw for people who want to visit and a major draw for people who want to live here. It's already such a prominent part of the community. What can we do to make it even more special and add to the culture and vibrancy of the town.

"This is also important to the different aspects of the community, including the waterfront. Why do we have a marina? Why do we have a trailer park? Why do we have a playground? All those facilities and services contribute to what makes this community special and what draws people here. Understanding that in terms of the impact of all the different facilities is part of the thinking and planning process."

Allen expressed his wish, on behalf of the steering committee, that user groups expressing their needs will be respectful of other groups' needs.

"It's a community project. What one group wants will have an impact on others. We will have to work together," he said.

"Obviously, a process like this can't provide everything to everyone, so there will naturally be compromises," Hustwick said.

"Groups need to really focus on what the fundamental needs are and not necessarily finding a perfect situation. It's really important we all try to address, through the consultant's facilitated process, the core priorities and objectives."

The consultant engaged for the project has just completed a similar one in Kingston, Darling said — a city with miles of waterfront and key heritage elements.

A timeline of significant dates was made public:

- April 4 — An interactive public open house starts at 5 p.m. in the Cameco Room at the Cobourg Community Centre (750 D'Arcy St.), with a review of the background material and a table-top map exercise.
- April 10 and 11 — From 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. both days in the Citizens' Forum at Victoria Hall (55 King St. W.), an interactive pre-charrette workshop will run. It consists of individual working meetings with members of community groups who have a key interest in waterfront development.
- April 24 — On-line surveys will be launched, a residential version and a community group-stake holder version.
- May 10 — An interactive public open house will offer an update on process and progress, and a chance for public feedback and input.
- May 31 — An interactive community-design charrette (a facilitated hands-on design process where people can take a hand in the planning) will include a presentation and workshop-style activities.
- June 27 — An interactive public open house will offer an update on process and progress, and a chance for public feedback and input.
- Sept. 27 — An interactive public open house will include a presentation of final products and options, and a request for input on preferences.

Notices regarding these public meetings and information sessions will appear at www.cobourg.ca, as well as on the town's social media sites and their regular advertising block in Thursday editions of Northumberland Today.

For more information, contact Behan at 905-372-8641.