

## **How Waterfront Heritage Park Designation Got Deferred by Council on November 4, 2019.**

From: Deborah Panko

Date: November 7, 2019

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Dear Cobourg Councilors:

What a dismal night at council this past Monday. Concerning the waterfront, this is what I heard and observed with some suggestions for you.

The evening began with yet another of the pointed, precise and moving delegations delivered by Dr. Margaret Bain and Dr. Richard Pope aimed at protecting Cobourg's West Harbour, at the heart of an area of the waterfront reaching from the West pier out to the West Beach, the West Headland and including the beautifully developed (by volunteers) Ecology Garden. There is support from five town advisory committees, different clubs including the province-wide Ontario Nature, and the public in general to preserve this area. Councilor Emily Chorley made a motion to designate this area as a waterfront heritage park that could not be developed without council's consent thus giving any future council as well the right to both allow and prohibit activities.

It wasn't long before the darkness started to creep in. Hunched into submissive pose, Councilor Adam Bureau said he needed to 'sink his teeth into it' and asked staff member, Dean Hustwick, to advise council. Mr. Hustwick readily obliged with a reminder of the tens of thousands of taxpayers' dollars spent on architects, planners, engineers, ecologists - many of them from out of town all too willing to tell Cobourg how to develop its waterfront. He didn't see the need for such a motion, calling it 'duplicating' and 'contradictory'. The delegation, however, was crystal clear. Its intent is to get park designation for the area described, which it doesn't have. Perhaps Director of Communications, Mr. Hustwick, missed what was being communicated.

With a shrug, staff member Rob Franklin didn't seem to know what to say. His voice shaky, Councilor Brian Darling confessed he liked nature too, BUT, BUT, BUT he was 'uncomfortable'. Mayor John Henderson commented on 'all the moving pieces' that hadn't been resolved and that made for a 'delicate discussion' suggesting that magically one day the pieces might come together... but NOT YET.

And so, starting with Clive Goodwin 25 years ago asking various councils to do something life-affirming about this area and getting nowhere, the motion has been 'referred/deferred', that is, put on hold into next year. As Mr. Hustwick lamented, staff's schedule is already full, the upcoming budget apparently being an onerous, time-consuming job (sigh) but even this excuse is irrelevant. Designation costs nothing. It costs nothing to recognize this priceless and unique place for what it is, but 'the boys' and Deputy Mayor Suzanne Seguin couldn't do it.

Council just wasted another opportunity, wasted the time and talents of one hard-working councilor and wasted the efforts of our own resident wildlife experts telling us to take this one small step NOW. It will be OK, they are saying. We can work it out together as many have been trying to do for decades. As Councilor Chorley pointed out, council is free to ask for staff input anytime along the way.

As frequently happens, Council members trapped themselves in 'points of order', put in play by Councilor Bureau and ending in his motion for deferral. The world is in a biodiversity crisis that includes, as one small part of that diversity, 3 billion birds lost since 1970 (29% of North America's bird population), yet where to put the yacht club's boat-lift and some contentious meters of boardwalk set off all the alarms. A most recent statement jointly signed by 11,000 scientists from 153 countries warns that without deep and lasting changes, the world is facing "untold human suffering." They say we've known about the need for change for 40 years, but nothing has happened.

So what can the town of Cobourg do to change course? Maybe it'll be contagious.

To start, Mayor Henderson could keep the darkness in check by setting a different tone. He could have commended Councilor Chorley for her initiative and faith in teamwork. Support her. Acknowledge that

suggestions from the Ganaraska Conservation Authority and discussions with several owners of private land are forthcoming. This is a work in progress, after all, but designation is still council's decision to make. A positive tone could have comforted Councilor Darling, alleviated Councilor Bureau's doubts, given room for Deputy Mayor Seguin to vote for what she supposedly supports and made Councilor Nicole Beatty's vote count. Instead, he set the stage for Councilor Chorley's original motion to be by-passed, sent off to grow mould in the bottom of one of Mr. Hustwick's drawers. It makes you wonder.

Delicate, fragile migrating birds fly thousands of miles each year crossing entire continents and sometimes an ocean to breed, such a miraculous, inspiring and humbling achievement that is filled with mystery. For water and shore birds, what Cobourg offers is a rare and hospitable place to land on the north shore of Lake Ontario before continuing on their journey. Our West Harbour and its surroundings is a place for a multitude of species, some to gather their strength and others to call home.

A simple gesture from Cobourg Council was needed on Monday, as Councilor Chorley said, to, 'formalize' Cobourg's intention', 'to get the ball rolling'. It didn't happen, leaving us all to lose heart.

Respectfully yours,  
Deborah Panko  
Cobourg Taxpayer  
November 7<sup>th</sup>, 2019