

To the chair, worshipful mayor, councillors, staff, fellow citizens thank you for this opportunity to speak on behalf of Engaged Citizens of Burlington.

At this meeting the Committee of the Whole will receive a staff report on Citizen Engagement.

As a group who work to improve engagement with citizens, Engaged Citizens of Burlington welcome that effort and would like nothing more than to be involved on behalf of citizens in the development of that engagement effort.

We are very aware that our city works hard to communicate. It devotes resources, people, time and money on that effort. Yet, our interactions with citizens suggest a widespread feeling that our city does not engage them in ways they would like to be engaged. Like ships that pass in the night we never seem to see each other and when we do, too often it is when we collide.

When that happens Council and Staff always seem disappointed, and bewildered, that this communication/engagement, despite your best intentions, fails and the city/citizen engagement gap is brought to your attention.

But the very fact that ECoB exists suggests that there is a gap between yours and our perception of communication and engagement, and that there is a wide range and significant number of citizens who feel their voices are not heard, that their fears and concerns for their city go unheeded, and this in a city which believes it is communicating so well.

Even by the standards of your own policy on "**Public Participation and Engagement**", which strives to meet **International Association for Public Participation** standards of engagement. Those standards range from **Inform, Consult, Involve, Collaborate and Empower**. On most issues you inform

very well; consult or involve all too rarely and usually too late in the process to have any meaningful impact, and, at the risk of offending, we never feel that level of collaboration which might make empowerment of citizens an achievable reality.

So how can it be that a city that boasts 8 Citizen Advisory Committees, with more to come, so often gives its citizens the impression that no-one is paying attention to them?

There is a widespread feeling that much of the city's engagement effort is geared towards ticking the "Engagement Boxes" where needed to speed regulatory processes through Staff to Council rather than real engagement and dialog with citizens. ECoB think this is reflected above in the suggestion that your efforts to **inform** are much more successful than any serious attempt to **consult, involve, collaborate or empower**.

As an example, here we are four years into the creation of an Engagement Charter process that was started in 2013 and adopted by council in April 2014 and ECoB is lobbying for Citizen Engagement in this process. Do Council and Staff begin to see why ECoB has issues with the engagement process when a well-meaning attempt to improve Citizen Engagement is already four years in the making with little or no Citizen Engagement in that process?

The report suggests that future engagement in the process will come from Citizen Advisory Committees which in ECoB's opinion may be part of a tired engagement model that has never really worked as well as the city might have hoped.

While well intended and filled by well-meaning citizens, the way Citizen Advisory Committees are constituted and their operating guidelines leave them too readily influenced by Council Members and Committee Staff assigned to them. With a few exceptions

they have not been the engagement vehicle we would like them to be.

Among various advocacy groups in the city and even within your own Citizens Advisory Committees there is a widespread feeling that Advisory Committees have become a simple extension of the city departments rather than independent advisors to council. That when a staff recommendation is supported by its appropriate Citizens advisory committee, Council are really just receiving a well manipulated repetition of the staff recommendation echoed by The Citizen Advisory.

If Councillors are not aware of this, just ask yourselves: When was the last time you heard a Citizens Advisory Committee delegate in opposition to a Staff recommendation?

It is no coincidence that most of the Citizens Advisory Committees have parallel, non-city sponsored advocacy groups. ITAC has BfAST, BSAC has BSCInc. And the work of the various Downtown Heritage, Parking and Sustainable Development Committees is paralleled by independent citizen groups from Alton Village to Brant Hills to Tyandaga. From Appleby Village to Rosedale to Downtown to Aldershot,

These advocacy groups are often made up of former members of Citizen Advisory Committees who found those citizens advisories ineffective and who now advocate for their various city wide interests where they feel they are more likely to be heard and with greater impact.

ECoB currently works with at least 11 area and ward specific groups and at least another 5 City wide advocacy groups. These 16 groups are Engaged Citizens whose voices will not be heard in the New Engagement Charter.

If Council and staff are happy with the present communication and engagement model, if you really feel you are reaching

citizens and that their voices are being heard, then probably nothing can be done. Local and city wide groups will continue to be frustrated and angered and will tie up your time and effort in the kind of oppositional engagement that model creates.

If however, you feel, as we do, that communication and engagement can be improved for the benefit of Council, Staff and Citizens, and the fact that you are receiving reports from staff on Improving engagement suggests you may actually feel that way, Engaged Citizens of Burlington has already reached out to Communication Managers with the City Manager's Office to explore how we might close that Engagement /Communication Gap which exists more often than either of us might like.

I am here tonight on behalf of Engaged citizens of Burlington to seek Council and Staff support for the inclusion of ECoB in that engagement process. The E in ECoB is for Engagement, it is not for Enraged and certainly not for Enemy.

Thank you council and staff for your time and your work on behalf of our city. Thank you citizens for your support and for allowing us to be you voice, Engaged Citizens of Burlington look forward to continuing, meaningful engagement with all of you.

Jim Young. ECoB