

Public Engagement Strategy
James O'Grady presentation to FEDCO

December 3, 2013

Mr. Mayor, Councillors,

My name is James O'Grady. I am the President of Unpublished Media Inc. and a resident of Ward 9 in Nepean. I am here today to speak to you about the Public Engagement Strategy report you have before you. As many of you know, I ran for City Council in 2010 on a governance platform. The central theme of my platform was the need to embed meaningful public consultation in the City's decision making processes, so that the City, and decisions made at City Hall better reflect the character, desires and needs of the City's population. Public consultation that engages all stakeholders equally and which is binding on all participants. Public consultation that uses a variety of tactics, including the use of technology, not to replace face-to-face meetings but rather to enhance the participation experience and to ensure the public consultation process is both transparent and accountable.

Like Mayor Watson—but not in the same way—I proposed a **Borough Council** governance model for Ottawa because it allows for local decision making and is more accommodating (than a one-size fits all strategy) of diverse cultural, demographic and linguistic differences among populations, especially in a city as large as the City of Ottawa.

Most importantly, I believe a public engagement strategy must tap into the 'collective intelligence' of our city. Ottawa is filled with intelligent, well educated people. We have the highest avg. education level of any city in Canada. I believe this is our biggest asset. Therefore, a successful public engagement strategy must be able to harness the collective intelligence of its population.

This is where the City's current strategy, even the process used during the public consultations for this proposed public engagement strategy, have failed. They do not tap into the collective intelligence of our population. On the contrary, they limit input to a few points, they prevent widespread discussion and an exchange of ideas among participants, both in real time and afterwards, and they discourage the public from participating in future consultations because they give the impression that public feedback will not be properly considered or transmitted in a transparent way to elected officials.

During the public consultation held in Barrhaven, as I also witnessed during the FCA-City held forum, participants were broken up into small groups with each individual limited to one point only. As someone who has studied and worked in this field, I have more than one idea to share. As I know many others do as well.

The overwhelming feedback that was expressed at both these meetings was that this strategy is only a **GUIDELINE** for Staff and NOT a **POLICY** that binds all stakeholders (Staff, elected officials, public, interest groups, etc.). While guidelines for Staff are important, an internal Staff strategy about how to engage the public in meaningful consultation is only one small part of a **comprehensive public engagement strategy**. Effective strategies are based on strong policy. Policy that is binding on all participants.

Therefore, this **strategy is too limited in its scope**. It doesn't include the public, community groups, interest groups or even elected officials. It only addresses the needs of Staff. This is insufficient.

The plan put forward lacks detail. Its missing specifics (what's going to be in the tool kit? Will Ottawa's strategy use online public engagement tools like other Canadian cities—Edmonton comes to mind; what processes and protocols will be used to ensure transparency and accountability? When and where in the processes will the public engagement occur? What guarantee will the public have that their participation will impact upon a decision).

Any plan that does not include ALL stakeholders is doomed to fail.

Recommendations:

1. **Policy not guidelines:**
Use this initial Staff guideline document as the first step toward creating a more comprehensive, inclusive and binding **policy** on public engagement.

2. **Comprehensive plan:**
Once a policy is in place, a comprehensive plan will need to be created in order to properly implement the policy. As mentioned above, the current plan, because it is for on Staff only, is too limited in its scope.

3. **Use governance experts**
There are many governance experts of all political stripes in Ottawa because Ottawa is Canada's capital. No where in the current consultation process for this strategy document were any governance experts consulted. This is a mistake. Tapping into the collective intelligence of our city's population means taking advantage of expert advice. If there was ever a time when the City should be consulting experts, its on this subject because let's face it, Staff don't like consulting the public. Its been made clear to many over the years that Staff would prefer not to consult the public if having the choice. For this reason, they are in a 'conflict of interest' position.

Mr. Mayor— Why don't you apply your unfulfilled election promise to engage governance experts to explore the viability of a Borough Council to this strategy on public engagement? Let's get the experts in here to hear what they have to say.

Thank you,

James O'Grady, President
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Nepean resident