

## Report to GA on FCA meeting 10 September 2014

The main business of the meeting was the panel discussion led by city hall insiders “*Working Effectively With Elected Officials*”. Three councillors, two of whom are running again, spoke and then answered questions

Councillor No. 1 talked about the Ward Council concept and how it is used in his ward – he is not a member but attends when invited. It is a self-led “coalition” of community associations (CAs) and it predates his election. The CAs decide who will attend these meetings – not the Councillor. He finds it most useful as a two-way information flow mechanism. It has been useful in mobilizing support for upgrades to city facilities and as a mechanism for finding out what people think those upgrades should encompass. Dialogue between citizens, planners and developers works best when the CAs are knowledgeable and well-prepared for meetings, including pre-development meetings. He interacts with CA presidents on development issues and also with the adjacent ward councillor on issues in common. In response to questions about development, he noted the planning initiative in Capital ward to ensure developers and citizens start communicating at the very outset of a proposed project. He also said that although a councillor is there to represent his ward, he has to consider issues outside his boundaries and city-wide issues too.

Councillor No. 2 emphasized the need for CAs to feed information into their councillor on their needs and priorities and then for the councillor to work to make things happen. Effective communication and pre-consultation with developers is the key. Patience and negotiation is working as are small meetings on a regular basis. Understanding the city planning process is important as is having good people working on the issues (staff and locals). CAs need to hold the city planning staff to the Planning Act rules (staff ignore them when they can get away with it). The ward council (designated CA representatives) didn’t work well so the process is now regular town hall meetings with published agendas to which anyone can come and also raise issues.

Councillor No. 3 pulled no punches – amalgamation did not result in lowered costs. In some cases, the costs rose (city staff salaries in the small municipalities rose to the level of the highest paid in old Ottawa), valuable infrastructure and transportation network knowledge was lost when senior staff were let go. Staff now have to cut services and hours in small increments (wading pools, community centres etc.) as budgets have not risen to keep up with population increases and demands for service. There is a lack of respect for citizens on the part of planning staff who are not carrying out the intent of the official plan in regard to intensification and who regard CAs as NIMBYers. Staff have no ability (or desire?) to research statements such as people in condos next to transit stations will walk to work rather than take transit – she says her view is that they take their cars – a result of the one car per unit policy. So developments that exceed the zoning are regularly approved based on misinterpretation of the OP and city staff attitude to intensification. And the fact that staff consider the developers, not citizens, as their clients. CAs will get on well with the city if they are “on the same page” Single issue groups can be effective – she mentioned Ecology Ottawa, WISE, Citizens for Safe Cycling - and if a group like the FCA could agree on one concept, seed money to promote the concept might be available.

In the general question period following, it was noted that:

- The current council is in group-think mode (no solution);
- the mayor is now voting against some high-rises;
- working in advance on issues is very important;
- get media attention;
- don’t use mass emailings – write individual letters or emails instead and tell the councillor how that issue affects you.