

Municipalities Act Review Comment

Municipal Conflict of Interest

The issue of conflict of interest legislation is not the primary problem. At present the declaration by a council that no conflict exists forces any resident affected to go to an expensive court process as a remedy.

There is no formal appeal process for residents such as an appeal of a development issue. This creates a perception of bias in the form of legislation being set in the interests of elected officials in exclusion.

I suggest that a formal process within the legislation for a resident to appeal any decision within reason that has a set of factors in place. The idea of a Town Council being the final word on conflict of interest is undemocratic and out of place in the 21st century.

It would not be a costly exercise to set up a three member panel at the Municipal Support Division to review protested decisions by council. In smaller communities, elections can be by acclamation and/or a majority of self interested people can control council. This process could practically vengeance claims by councillors as well.

Public Consultation

There is no clear definition as to what constitutes adequate and procedurally fair public consultation. I would recommend a process similar to the indigenous consultation process, with clearly defined rules for defining procedural process. Again, the only recourse for residents is access to the expensive courts. Again, a process at the Municipal Support level could be structured. Public consultation at the municipal level is basically non-existent now.

Agenda and Public Meeting Minutes, & Public Notice Communication

This whole process of communication must enter the 21st century. The distribution of the agenda for public meetings in this technology advanced age is as simple as a single click of an email distribution system. MailChimp, Constant Contact, and AWeber can distribute an agenda in seconds to subscribing interested residents.

I know of no resident who does not have this capability. The secrecy of the agenda is undemocratic in this age. It is now like a state secret to obtain an agenda. Placing an agenda on a website is NEVER efficient or timely. Better communication can eliminate much of the controversy surrounding municipal council secrecy.

The clarity for agenda items and sufficient information in public meeting minutes must be defined in some manner that meets the basics of democratic communication.

The issue here is always having an agenda, public notice, minutes etc. in a timely manner to support analysis and awareness. Traditional newspaper placement of Public Notices in smaller communities with a weekly paper or placement in traditional dailies with poor circulation is out of step with democracy today. Waiting for a town worker to place an agenda on a website by contacting a webmaster is out of step with democracy.

In today's travelling workforce contact with the local council is essential. Email and Social Media supports democracy

There is no reason why a Town Council could not use FaceBook as well where connection with residents is instant. The newspaper placement is simply dated, undemocratic, and unnecessary expense. It is also very expensive. More open communication can never be wrong.

Crown Land Applications

The changes in the Lands Act has eliminated a vital communication opportunity for openness. It is essential that residents looking to protect public land and support orderly development get a proper notice of applications. This entire process must become more transparent.

Poor communication between Municipal Council and residents is the single reason for turmoil in communities. When information is readily available for analysis conflict will be reduced. Municipal Affairs would do well to update the entire communication requirements section of the legislation.

Further consultation should be undertaken to ensure community groups concerned with municipal democracy are involved with the review. A public session, similar to the Lands Act review which took place at the Capital Hotel some time ago would be helpful. I am certain that other improvements would come to the surface with consultation with other groups and a public discussion. If I can offer my time in public service at any time, please contact me.

Thank you

Edward Vickers

Friends of Ragged Beach Inc