

The City of Ottawa's Governance Review 2009

People for a Better Ottawa:

Helping Residents to Speak Out on the Governance Review

The City of Ottawa's governance review will change the way City Council makes decisions, consults with residents and delivers services which will impact on your neighbourhood and your city:

1. Changes to how Council makes decisions. This includes how Standing Committees work (their mandate, membership and relationship to Council), the role of Councillors and the Mayor.
2. Changes in how services are delivered. This includes how the City funds and delivers services like, health, housing, child care, and community health through local boards, municipal boards or municipal service corporations.
3. Changes in the current methods of resident engagement and input.

On Saturday May 23rd PBO held our Community Forum on the Governance Review to work with Ottawa residents to develop a position on this Governance Review and to help residents to make their views known to Council.

Through a three hour an open dialogue we were able to reach a consensus on four priority issues for Ottawa residents:

What residents said they wanted:

About the budget process:

- We want open and on-going participation in the budget process. Budget material must be understandable so all residents can participate. Members of council must take an active role in engaging their constituents in the budget process. Staff must provide the information that is required for this to happen.
- Engagement must happen from the outset of the development of the draft budget – we don't want to be put in the position of having to react to the draft budget. The budget process must abide by the principle that budgets are as much about the values and needs of citizens as it is about sound financial management. We want a bottom up process that takes into

consideration the needs of residents and communities. There are good models that we can examine.

- We want to improve revenue sources as well as spend smarter. We should not be content to live within the existing revenue constraints. There are other sources of revenue than the property taxes. Residents need more information on how the City generates revenues and how and where it receives additional funding from senior levels of government. We want the city to be smarter and better about getting revenue and to work more closely with community groups, agencies and residents to pressure senior governments to increase funding or change legislation to allow our City to raise the revenue it needs to support quality of life in our City. Toronto did it and so can we.
- We want a broad approach to budget decisions – looking at social and environmental impacts. Using a Triple Bottom Line Approach means taking into consideration the social/cultural, economic/financial and environmental impact of any budget. When we examine the budget to ensure it is achieving the things that are important we need to take the triple bottom line into consideration. If you don't measure what you value, you end up not valuing what counts.

About public engagement:

- We want the City to use a variety of mechanisms to support and provide good, understandable information. For example, in both rural and urban areas, we need better use of municipal client service centres, user-friendly technology and multiple languages.
- We want community-run services – services that are responsive to residents and involve residents in decision-making.
- We want city-wide coalition involvement at City Hall. There have to be ways and mechanisms for citizens to come together at a city-wide level to engage in City government.
- We need proactive measures and mechanisms to ensure that all groups and citizens have access to information, are able to make their views known and have them heard (youth, newcomers to Canada, women.) This involves innovative approaches to consultation, getting information out and keeping the public educated and engaged. This includes measures and processes for women to be actively involved.

About Advisory Committees and Ward Councils:

- We want ward councils to work. They must be formalized. We believe that ward councils are a good forum for public accountability and provide opportunities for councillors to hear directly on important community issues as well as for communities to hear from their councillors and other community members.
- We want the advisory committees to be better resourced. A better orientation for committee members' would help. Also, the advisory committees must maintain ongoing connections to the community and to one another. There also must be more inter-connections between advisory committees and Council Standing committees.

About public transit:

- We want public transit to take priority over the automobile.
- We need better funding and better planning: there must be better integration of transit planning with land-use planning and minimizing urban sprawl.
- We need to recognize the critical importance of public transit for those who depend upon it in their daily lives. At the same time, rights to collective bargaining are important ones enshrined in law. A process must be established so that we never again pit the needs and interests of these two segments of our population directly against each other.
- Better access – This includes making transit affordable, and expanding services to facilitate accessibility – that is to ensure that citizens who need access can get it.