

Linda Whetham on The Issues Facing Cambridge

My Dear Cambridge Residents:

I would like to thank you for sharing with me your vision of and for the City of Cambridge. As you are well aware, I have defended a strong, non-amalgamated City that functions well within the current two-tiered system.

1. You have told me over the course of the last ten years, as I have proudly discharged my duties as a City Councillor, that you want a fiscally responsible, compassionate and caring, common-sense approach to Municipal Government.
2. You have told me that you want a back-to-basics, respectful, clean, and affordable place in which to raise your children.
3. You have told me that you want a fair, stream-lined, reasonably expedient process in the acquisition of permits and approvals, whether you are setting-up a small, local family business, or a large multinational company that will employ 100s or 1,000s of our friends and neighbours.
4. You have told me that you want safe, accessible, modern Seniors' facilities for yourselves, for your parents, and for your grand-parents, as they enter their golden years.
5. You have told me that you identify with and enjoy the unique beauty and flavour of each area of our city: Blair, Galt, Hespeler, and Preston; and that you would like to see a more equitable treatment for all.
6. You have told me that you would like to see a more customer service oriented approach from some Municipal Civil Servants.
7. You have also told me that you would like to see more transparency and accountability from your Municipal Government.

Acknowledging that you have expressed a multitude of wishes and concerns, I would like to bring some perspectives and share a few ideas that will take us much closer to our ideal, yet realistic, City of Cambridge.

A Brief History

As a Councillor, I served the people of my ward, always mindful of the primary role of Municipal Government--local physical infrastructure: roads, sewers, water, etc. While keeping an eye on every public penny that was spent, I also exercised compassion in that I voted in favour of providing assistance with: affordable housing, neighbourhood groups, The Bridges, and The Cambridge Self-Help Food Bank.



As the Hydro money (\$38 million) was intended to be a rainy day buffer to soften the blow of any potential future Hydro rate increase, I could not support the building of the Civic Administration Building, two terms ago. Unfortunately that potential future Hydro rate increase is here now and we don't have any buffer. Our citizen's hydro bills have just increased dramatically.

I was particularly disturbed by the additional expenditure of over \$1.8 million on the glass link to go 60 feet from the Civic Admin. Bldg. to the Historic City Hall. I felt this addition was unnecessary and expensive. The heritage community was also very upset by this project and I thought they had valid concerns.

In view of the fact that the City of Cambridge had given the University of Waterloo's School of Architecture over \$6 million, I was disappointed that Conestoga College did not receive the same consideration.

Instead, our Council bought the land for \$5 million; held it for the College for 5 years; then the city asked the College to pay the original \$5 million plus the interest. The argument being presented by the current Mayor is that the land appreciated in value 100% over 5 years; and therefore we gave them the same amount of money that we gave the University. I disagree. It did not and we did not. At a time when the price for unserviced land remained pretty stagnant, surely the interest on the \$5 million alone was higher than the supposed increase in the property value. Conestoga College is the best community college in Ontario. Their training programs give our community real jobs. I would like to look at building a better relationship with the college and if it is fiscally possible I think we could look at more ways to work together with them. Just as our city has done with the School of Architecture.

Drayton Theatre came to Cambridge with big plans and high hopes. Although no business plan has ever been presented to the City of Cambridge by Drayton, our Mayor went to bat for them with the Federal and Provincial governments. Most of our Council voted to spend \$900,000.00 on the preliminary designs for Drayton. I voted against it as I believe that City of Cambridge tax dollars are not to be used on private enterprise (for profit or not). We do not do this for the small, local family-owned businesses, why would we do this for any outside business? I think Drayton would be wonderful for the City, but we should not have to pay the full cost of Drayton Theatre moving to Cambridge.

What are our priorities in Cambridge? At one point the Provincial Treasurer said that Mr. Craig would have to choose between funding the Cambridge Memorial Hospital expansion or Drayton Theatre. To date, the Cambridge Hospital has still not received any money from the Province of Ontario for expansion.

Fiscal Responsibility

A few years ago, the City of Cambridge expropriated land in West Galt, for a parking lot. Now Drayton is going to be located on that site. The total process of expropriation and the environmental clean-up was about \$3 million. Add to it the \$900,000 design study and the City's commitment of \$6 million and the price tag is \$10 million. **This is creating additional debt for our city.**

This question remains: If before Drayton, we needed parking so much that we had to expropriate land on this site, are we not going to have to buy/expropriate even more land, now that Drayton is coming to Cambridge? How much will that cost? Will the City be building a multistory parking facility right next to Drayton? Is that going to cost us another \$10 million?

Looming on the horizon is another expensive project that I am concerned about. The Venice Biennale is a huge project that will cost taxpayers millions of dollars. All of these projects are wonderful but our streets need repair, our parks are looking run down and there is litter and graffiti everywhere. Shouldn't we clean house before we invite the guests for dinner? Fortunately this project has been deferred until 2011--after this

Fall's election.

In Cambridge we need to concentrate on meeting the basic needs of our mandate first and foremost.

Because of the excellent geographic location, the great socio-economic positioning of our City, and because of the fantastic energy and vibrancy of our people, the best achievements for us as a community, are yet to come! We have highly skilled trades people, well-educated professionals, and a wealth of opportunities. We have to bear in mind that we, as a Municipal Government have to set the best possible environment for businesses to want to locate in our City. (This means low taxes, no red tape, and efficient City staff.) We as a government set the policies. Business creates the jobs. People raise their families.

This is your City!

We need to maintain the pools, arenas, and parks that we currently have. Because of these pie-in-the-sky projects we cannot at this time, even consider upgrading what we have. The next two years are going to be especially difficult because of some of the decisions that have already been made but with me as Mayor we will be ever mindful of the public purse and the needs of our families .

Permits & Approvals

Working within the current framework, I would like to see the City's website become truly interactive, whereby individuals, companies, and other organizations could apply for permits online; pay for them online; and receive a confirmation online. There is no reason for which the City of Cambridge could not have a permit for most simple situations sent back to the client within 24 to 48 business hours. After all, we're living in Canada's Technology Triangle. It is about time that we catch up. Insurance companies do this. Banks do this. Some Federal and some Provincial Government Departments do this. This could cut through so much red tape. It would simply save everyone involved an immeasurable amount of time.

Modern State of the Art Seniors Facility

I am committed to keeping our three existing Seniors' Centres. However, as our ageing populations grows, the demand to meet their needs will grow. We need to look to the future to build a more Modern, State of the Art Seniors' Facility.

Again, because of the current fiscal situation at the City of Cambridge we will not be able to plan this right away, but we do need one Centralized Recreation Facility that would be created with Seniors in mind and I know this is a priority for many of our Seniors.

Fair & Equitable Treatment for All of Cambridge

For a decade, if not for longer, some areas of our City seem to have been overlooked, while others are streetscaped with greater frequency. This leads to unnecessary interruptions of business, resentment by other parts of the City, and unforgivable excessive spending of the tax purse.

Unless it is for maintenance purposes, there can be no real justification for re-designing or "re-streetscaping" any more than every 15 to 20 years.

Tax dollars are precious and few!

Better Customer Service

In a few years, when the City of Cambridge digs its way slowly out of debt, a few things should be done to address and to improve our service to you--our clients and stakeholders:

A. Software can be purchased that will automatically tape all incoming and outgoing calls. The software is centralized with the telephone system, and cannot be over-ridden by the set user. Call recovery/retrieval is nearly instantaneous--and can only be accessed by the designated person--a truly arm's length Integrity-Ethics Commissioner.

B. At present, we already have cameras at key locations. We need to ensure that they also have audio. Have the camera-feed digitally stored on a computer (with a taped back-up every 24 hours). Again, the only person with access would be the Integrity-Ethics Commissioner. (This is standard practice for most secured institutions.)

C. Hire an independent Integrity-Ethics Commissioner, who would review complaints against all parties within the City, with the exception of Elected Officials. (A review of Elected Officials falls to the Ombudsman, or to the courts.) This would be a time limited contract position and could not be held twice by the same person.

D. Ombudsman. A couple of years ago, the City of Cambridge opted out of having the Provincial Ombudsman hear complaints about the City. Our Council chose to go with a representative from the Association of Municipalities of Ontario. This makes for very bad optics. I believe the residents would be better served by an independent Ombudsman.

E. All City of Cambridge-produced, or referenced reports should be online (unless they are confidential). Our citizens could search for them by title, subject, report number, or by date of creation. Nowadays every report is created using computers. There is no reason for which the public cannot access them from the City's website. Any drawings, schematics, and the like, could be scanned-in and you simply point, click, save, or print. This will provide a faster, and more cost-effective service to the public. It is also much more Eco-friendly.

Transparency & Accountability

F. All of Council's, Committees of Council ; any meeting that the public can access (save Lawfully Closed Door meetings) be available live (and in online archives) to the public through the City's Website. The online retention could be 3 months; after which they would only be available by calling the City Clerk and having him/her send them by e-mail.

G. Because we now have the system to do it, I would propose that all votes that are taken at Council, or Committee of Council meetings be automatically recorded and placed online along with the Draft Minutes, and then with the Confirmed Minutes.

H. External Efficiency Audit. I would like to see an independent External Efficiency Audit. The auditor's name would be drawn from out a hat at the last Council meeting of the year, from a list of Qualified Firms (more than 100 kms. Away from our Region). His or her report would be placed on the City's Website, unfettered. Such an audit would allow to see how we can best utilize our resources for the greatest benefit to you--our Citizens!

Voice at the Region

Because the Mayor's role is to represent the wishes of the people, through the collective voice of the elected councillors that surround that Mayor, I will be carrying your intent, dear residents, to the Regional Table so that my people in Cambridge can get their fair share of the pie.

The Light Rail Transit (LRT) sounds wonderful but in the last few weeks many people of this city have told me they don't want it. What is not particularly palatable is the price tag and the proposed routes. I will be the strong, independent voice that will be able to work with our Regional partners for the benefit of the people of the City of Cambridge. I want to see public transportation for Cambridge examined more thoroughly at the Region. The busiest highway in Canada runs through Cambridge and that should be the starting point for any discussions on transportation in Waterloo Region, LRT or otherwise.

It is my hope to have our two Regional Councillors, serve as they once did, on both Councils. I believe that the people are better served this way, and Regional Councillors or Mayor should update City Council on Regional issues.

Environment & Engagement

As Mayor, I intend to look at creating partnerships with the surrounding post-secondary institutions, with Federal and Provincial Governments, as well as with local industry to design projects whereby the students might be able to get academic credit/monetary compensation for their contribution to project-specific study that would look at cost-effective ways to "green" different City of Cambridge practices. It is a win, win! The nature of the project would have to be determined by their University or College and the sponsoring industry.

The City would continue to look for ways to become less dependent on the grid by perhaps placing solar panels on City-owned buildings. We would like to be "green" conscious in two ways: environment and money. We could also look at purchasing electric vehicles, as older vehicles are being de-commissioned. Again, we need to be "green" in two ways.

Any community event that now carries a prefix like "The Mayor's...." as part of the title, will be changed to drop the prefix ("Cambridge Night at the Movies", as an example). This city is ours, collectively! That should be reflected in everything we do.

You, the residents of the City of Cambridge have told me what you want, and this is what I will work hard to achieve for all of us in Cambridge.

As the mayor of a city only has one (1) vote (and ethically, only to break a tie vote, or under a polled vote), I will need your support not just on election day, but on each and every day during my term of office; should I be privileged to serve as your Mayor.

This is our city! Get involved.

We, as a city cannot afford to ever again allow ourselves to fall prey to the whims of the few, at the expense of the many.

I would like to see more people involved in municipal politics. Children should learn more about how our city is run. We all need to attend council meetings from time to time. We need to participate more directly by reading the reports produced by our staff. We need to comment publicly and not just in letters to

the Editor after the fact; As our municipal government is the closest level of government to the people we need to engage with greater passion during the process. I invite you to work with me and together we can build a more transparent, equitable, and fiscally responsible Municipal Government.

Thank you,

Linda Whetham

Monday September 27, 2010