



I WILL CHANGE THE WAY WE DO BUSINESS.

Municipal governments are the closest to the people. No level of government influences our living conditions as directly. In order for a town government to serve its constituents, it must be transparent. We need to see what's being discussed, to have easy ways to be heard, and to see that the decisions taken reflect the views of the entire community.

Current events have damaged municipal politics extensively. In many jurisdictions, citizens feel a sense of entitlement in their elected officials and they no longer trust them to do what is best for the community. Even in municipalities with clean records, residents wonder what they're not being told.

A strange situation is happening right here in Hampstead

Here's how things currently work. Hampstead councilors take on extra responsibilities like Finance and Urban Planning. We're called portfolio chairs. I'm responsible for Community Services, Recreation, Communications, and Sustainability. Our job is to work with town staff to oversee our areas of responsibility.

In the last year, I have been purposely kept out of discussions in my areas of responsibility. Staff was told to keep me in the dark about issues related to my portfolios. Now, I'm told that I need to file Access to Information requests for the documents. These are the very documents I need to keep me on top of what you are concerned about so I can make decisions in the best interest of all of us in the Town.

I've spoken with councilors and mayors in other cities and towns in Québec. The consensus: there is no law that requires a member of a town or city council to file Access to Information requests to get the information that they need to do their job. In fact, many mayors I contacted said that the whole notion of Access to Information requests for council was ridiculous.

The trend towards secrecy starts from the top

As councilors, we want to make the best decisions with full knowledge of the facts and with input from the people who are affected by a decision.

That is increasingly difficult in Hampstead. For example, your elected representatives are only given the council and caucus agendas ONE business day before the official meeting to make decisions. That means that all the information we use for decision-making comes from just one source and reflects one point of view. This is not the way to run a town like Hampstead.

As well, with the current administration, we use "caucus confidentiality" as a cloak to keep important issues from the public. Obviously, this policy is part of the problem – there is too much secrecy built in. Transparency and accountability are foremost on my agenda. We need to renew the bond of trust between "you," the citizens and "us," your local government.

How I would fix this problem

I propose that councilors go over the upcoming agendas at our mid-month meeting, two weeks before the official council meeting. Topics could then be posted on the Town's website under a new link called Council Deliberations. Each topic would have a short summary explanation. Council members could add their positions if they wanted. Resident could e-mail their comments to council. That way, when the official council meeting takes place, we would have had a preliminary discussion, solicited resident feedback, and had time to do our own research.

The key to restoring confidence is opening the doors

What is there to hide? Anything that has been prepared for and paid for by the Town should be available to the residents, easily and on our website.

Our residents should be given the opportunity to be fully engaged. Constituents who feel powerless to bring about change become jaded, stop voting, stop participating, and stop volunteering.

My goal for Hampstead: an involved community, a town that's 100% open to true community consultation, not just when we have to by law. Residents should be encouraged to bring their ideas and thoughts to membership on boards, committees and commissions.

I'm running for mayor for open, honest leadership

I'm running for Mayor because I believe we deserve more in Hampstead. Simply, we deserve excellence. Local government must reach out to you with clear, accurate and honest information through a wide range of communications vehicles like social media, our website, email campaigns, newsletters, speeches, presentations and more.

If you choose me as your mayor, I want to know what you care about, your perspective, your needs.

That's how we're going to make Hampstead a better place to live for all of us.

Bonnie Feigenbaum