

# Swansea Area Ratepayers' Association

*Reflecting the interests of the Swansea Community*



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## Swansea Area Ratepayers' Group

### Annual General Meeting Minutes

Wednesday May 19, 2013

- Call to Order:** Nick Singh at 7:35 pm.  
**Present:** Nick Singh, David Fleming, Kate Lawson, John Meijer, Bill Roberts, Gared Daniel, Brian O'Rourke, Elizabeth Elson, Sybil Wilkinson, Louis Gris, Ian McIsaac  
**Regrets:** Ed Gaigalas, Keith Dicks  
Councillor Sarah Doucette  
**Guests:** Fiona Crean – City of Toronto Ombudsman  
Greg Denton for Peggy Nash, MP  
Katherine Trimble for Councillor Sarah Doucette, Ward 13

Nick Singh opened the meeting with an explanation things that SARA does in the community and asked for new volunteers and members for the executive.

- Approval of Agenda: David Fleming motioned approval, Bill Roberts seconded and carried  
Approval of Minutes from 2012: David Fleming motioned approval as amended, Brian O'Rourke seconded and carried  
Membership Report: John Meijer read the report and motioned approval, Loius Gris seconded and carried  
Treasurers Report: Kate Lawson motioned approval, John Meijer seconded and carried

#### **Presidents Report:**

It has been another busy year in Swansea and your Ratepayers' Association has been doing a fairly good job of trying to keep up. Here are the important issues we have been dealing with.

The expansion of the Boulevard Club. There is a master plan for our western portion of the waterfront and part of that plan is to open up the waterfront to pedestrians for the entire length of the waterfront including the public property that the Club currently has closed off. In exchange for the expansion we are hoping to recover some lakefront and extend the Boardwalk but the Club is saying it is impossible. This will be a future negotiation.

In the meantime we continue to participate in getting our waterfront cleaned up and improved. There is an environmental study for some artificial Islands to be placed near the mouth of the Humber so that the flow of the Humber river will stop polluting the beach. A temporary BMX park is planned to go up against the Gardiner. The actual start of these projects will depend on the City having the money.

We have been successful in getting some changes to the entrance of the parking lot at the Sobeys plaza. The original design was causing congestion and some safety problems. The improvements are working well.

A massive tower project is being proposed for the Four Points Sheraton hotel site at the bottom of Windermere and Lakeshore. And we expect to be involved in that one soon.

In the mean time we will be before the OMB in August with the 34 Southport development at the Southport Plaza. We have concerns about potential damage to surrounding buildings due to necessary drainage of the site, as there was considerable damage the last time they did drainage for construction, so we are looking for protections to be put in place. There is also

concern about the height and density of the two towers, at 29 and 26 stories, and the minimum amount of retail which will be available for shops and services.

The Tridel development at Bloor and South Kingsway ran into some underground problems earlier on. You never know what you will find when you dig in the Swansea area. Development is well underway now.

If you had a opportunity to look at the Save our Village initiative, you will know that the three high rise projects at the east end of the Village are progressing. The Daniels development across the street from High Park was deemed not to be covered by legislation that protects the Park, because the term 'adjacent to' does not legally include the other side of the road. So that project is going up. The development at 1990 Bloor St. W. is proposed at 12 stories; it is going to the OMB. The development at 2114 Bloor St. W. is planned for 10 stories; it is awaiting the decision on 1990 Bloor St W..

All of this development has united a number of Ratepayer's groups to see what can be done to guide development, so that the distinctive character and ambiance of Bloor West is maintained and encouraged, when the developers move in. We are making an application for a Heritage Conservation District designation for Bloor St., from the Humber River in the west to Keele St. in the east. It is a massive project that will take many years and lots of money.

We continue to challenge over-the-top developments at the Committee of Adjustment, which in our opinion has approved some outrageous applications. Often times, applicants are asking for changes that are not minor by any measure, yet the Committee of Adjustment has approved them, even though the Committee's mandate is to approve "minor adjustments" to the by-law. We are going to initiate work on that problem by seeing what can be done to reign in the Committee of Adjustment.

The City project to Harmonize the City's various by-laws, which need was a consequence of the Mike Harris Amalgamation, is nearing its final phase, after one false implementation and several years of development and consultation. Bill Roberts has been very busy reviewing the many aspects of the by-laws as they affect us, and getting changes made, to protect our community.

On the fund raising front, we will not be participating in the Toronto Waterfront Marathon this year, because two of our partners have decided to pull out and the two remaining partners (the Royal Canadian Legion and SARA) do not have enough manpower to do a good job. Please keep an eye out for our evening at the Village Playhouse, for our fundraiser in November.

You can get more details from our newsletter, which you receive with your membership. If you are not a member please complete an application form. It is only \$14 for a whole family for the year. And, please encourage your neighbours to join.

#### **Election of the Board of Directors for 2013-2014 presented by Jack Slaughter:**

The candidates for election are:

President:	Nick Singh
Vice President:	Ian McIssac
Secretary:	David Fleming
Treasurer:	Kate Lawson
Past President:	Louis Gris
Directors:	Bill Roberts
	Sybil Wilkinson
	John Meijer (Membership Chair)
	Gared Daniel
	Elizabeth Elson
	Brian O'Rourke
	Keith Dicks
	Andrew Reitknecht

Bill Roberts asked for further nominations for the Board of Directors. None. Nick Singh moved the nominations be closed. The motion was seconded by John Meijer carried. The nominees were elected by acclamation. Bill Roberts motioned that the Executive be allowed to fill vacancies as required over the year. The motion was seconded by Kate Lawson and carried.

**Guest Speaker Introduction:** Nick Singh introduced the City of Toronto Ombudsman, Fiona Crean.

**Guest Speaker – City of Toronto Ombudsman, Fiona Crean:** Ms. Crean asked the crowd what an ombudsman's job is. The answer was close -- an advocate. "Ombudsman" is the Swedish word for "representative" or "proxy", and is a unisex word. As Ombudsman, Ms Crean provides a forum for citizens and residents in which to launch a complaint, and have something done about it. For example, President Singh mentioned the process at the Committee of Adjustment.

The position, City of Toronto Ombudsman, is only four-and-a-half years old, and the first for the City. It is needed, because Toronto is a big, complicated organization, and things go wrong. The system is one of the strongest in the world. Ms Crean is interested in how things get fixed. She is an officer of City Council, and reports to City Council as a whole. However, she does not have 45 individual bosses (1 mayor and 44 councillors). The office is funded by the taxpayers, and her budget is closely scrutinized. Because of this, most of her advertising is done by the media.

Her job is to cut through red tape. For example, she tried to find a homeless man a bed. In spite of her position, this project took twelve days and nights, working on long and complicated forms, and seven different ways to enter the system.

She does a lot of shuttle diplomacy, and tries to effect systemic changes with her staff. While helping individuals, she tries to make changes for hundreds of citizens, not just one or several.

Her office is exempt from the Freedom of Information Act; otherwise, no one would come forward. Hers is an office of last resort whose mandate is to ensure that public servants implement City Council decisions and implement them fairly.

Ms Crean asked for questions. Some questions and her answers are summarized, as follows:

How do you deal with the difficulties of being ombudsman? – Hot Yoga, and not taking things personally, such as finding a dead rat, delivered to her door.

What types of complaints do you deal with, and what is the criteria for agreeing to work on a complaint? - Her jurisdiction is all aspects of City of Toronto processes; she described areas over which she does and does not have jurisdiction. Criteria for acceptance of a particular complaint: It must be "last resort", with two exceptions, which are 1) excessive delay and 2) a complainant, who is so marginalized, that putting him back into the system would be cruel. Fairness is her "yardstick". Was the process fair? Was the decision substantially fair? Was the person handled fairly, according to their circumstances? Her priorities are "loss of housing", "loss of income" and "systemic problems". Sometimes she accepts public interest cases, such as parking tickets and excessive, unexplained water bills.

How is it that some Toronto Star reporters seem to be doing your job for you? - Reporters do not investigate or have powers to compel information. She has no vested interest or opinion, and must remain neutral. She is interested only in facts and fairness.

Why is there so much scrutiny? - It's not a popular office. (Who wants oversight or scrutiny?) Also, the value of "fairness" is hard to measure.

How can the public show support for the office? - She appreciates all forms of support. Please tell your elected officials.

Social networking? - She is on Twitter, but not Facebook or blogs, primarily because her staff are so busy and have no budget for them.

What type of backgrounds do your office staff have or need? - There is a heavy weighting of people whose backgrounds are related to providing social work.

**Adjournment:** The meeting was adjourned after the question period.