

WILDLIFE STRATEGY REVIEW

WORKING WITH THE COMMUNITY

When community and environmental organizations wrote to the mayor and councillors on May 16th this year, they listed a number of key elements that are essential for a progressive Wildlife Strategy.

It's not surprising that at the top of that list is Public Engagement, Working with Local Stakeholder Organizations and Building Lasting and Trusting Relationships.

The City's Challenge

The previous city administration has resisted working with the community for many years. We recognize the difficulty in changing a corporate culture – a culture that has been closed, defensive and inward looking for more than a decade. However, this concern goes well beyond the Wildlife Strategy, so it is one that must be addressed.

Governance

Mayor Sutcliffe has promised that *“increasing trust, transparency and accountability is an enormous priority for him”*. However, despite the commitment of the mayor, council and senior staff for a more collaborative and transparent city government, for it to be more than rhetoric, it will require specific actions.

For the Wildlife Strategy and other initiatives, it will mean selecting staff who are not only open to and welcome new ideas but who are prepared to work with the community in implementing them.

There is a wealth of expertise in Ottawa, with organizations and individuals who have invested years in contributing to the betterment of the community. Many of these groups are working on behalf of the environment where the City needs wide community support in responding to new environmental demands as well as the climate emergency.

Recommendations:

- 1) Staff chosen to work on implementing a modern Wildlife Strategy need to have not only the right skill sets and an understanding of the current science but the desire to make a positive difference.

Too often, some city of Ottawa staff members, although working on wildlife issues, have shown a reluctance to get involved in a wildlife concern, directing it instead to By-law and Regulatory Services for what can often, not surprisingly, turn out to be a reactive and negative outcome.
- 2) Staff need to see residents and community organizations as an ally and potential partners not as an obstacle to be avoided.
- 3) The first step is for the city to put its Employee Directory back up online. The Directory was quietly removed in 2021 but councillors only became aware when residents complained. A member of the Hintonburg Community Association Board, in an interview with the CBC in June 2022 said *“it really hides and insulates the city from the public, I'm afraid they will never put it back up again”*.

The CBC reported that the city said the Employee Directory was removed *“as a potential cybersecurity concern, although there were no incidents linked to that decision”*. Ottawa stands alone as both the City of Toronto and the federal government have their Employee Directories online.

And, although Councillor Leiper indicated, at the time of the interview, that he would be looking for answers from staff, the Employee Directory is still not available online. It sends a strong message from city staff that they don't want to hear from the public.

Prepared by Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre
October 2023