

January 23, 2024

Open letter to:

- Mayor and Council of the Town of Cobourg
- John Draper Blog
- Northumberland News

Dear Recipients:

I thought it would be important to clarify some points after my presentation on the re-statement of Lifeguards at Cobourg Beach, presented on January 18th.

There was one instance during the question period after my presentation when the Mayor seemed to be disturbed by the comments I made regarding response times in a potential incident on the beach. To bring this into perspective: here is a likely scenario with and without lifeguards:

With Lifeguards:

- An attentive lifeguard(s) with training would have seen either a man on the pier waving his hands and/or a person in distress in the water just beyond the buoys. (About 150 meters). This could also be a diligent beachgoer to alert a nearby lifeguard to kick into action.
- The next sequence would be for the lifeguard to make an emergency call on a walkie-talkie to the appropriate authorities.

Without Lifeguards:

- The actual narrative and timing of the actions taken by a private citizen and other agencies are described in the Northumberland news.

Further to my presentation and about 5 hours later, the council deliberated re-instating the lifeguards back into the budget. Some elements of the council deliberations should be clarified as follows:

- ... *don't want 15-year-olds as lifeguards.*
- ... *don't have open beach training.*
- ... *liability is too high with lifeguards.*
- ... *not responsible beyond the buoys.*

The first two concerns can be set up in a contract with the YMCA to request lifeguards no less than a certain age and all must have open beach training. In addition to this, a contract can stipulate regular Emergency training with other agencies.

The third contentious point is liability. In extensive research on this, it is most likely that liability doesn't change as litigation can occur regardless of whether lifeguards are present on Cobourg property. In any event, all supporting parties have adequate insurance to cover any legal action. To make a case in point, the YMCA has been lifeguarding this beach for 40 years with no drownings!

(and I presume no legal issues). The Lifesaving Society of Canada states in their Waterfront Safety Standards that there is a reduced liability component when lifeguards are present.

“Ultimately the owner of a waterfront is responsible for the safe operation of the facility ...(and open beaches)”

The last point about the area of responsibility can also be contractual and can be stated as “between the lifeguard flags and the buoys”.

Another point to consider when deciding on lifeguards. We have heard that “parents should be responsible for their children”. It should be noted that it could be an adult that gets into trouble and I don’t think we expect the children to save them, although a child can easily alert an identified lifeguard.

Final points and comments:

In reviewing the other expenses approved by the council, it isn’t clear why some of these expenditures would fall ahead of beach safety issues (new desks or even raises for council members).

In addition, it is sad to experience bullying at the question portion of the presentation. This deposition was from a citizen caring for Cobourg and the safety of its citizens and visitors. Had this been a taxpayer who was involved in a serious incident, I think the discussion would have been much different.

May I remind the Mayor that in his radio interview July 6, 2023 on 93.3 FM, in regards to his desire to cancel lifeguards, he states that:

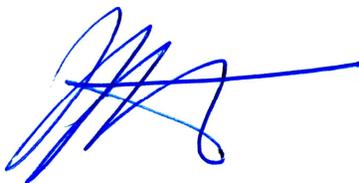
“We need more than 80 people fill out these surveys ... so we can know what the community is looking for”.

<https://www.gonorthumberland.ca/2023/07/06/631497/>. Our survey had **115** in the K9A postal code area!

I find it also disturbing that a personal experience with no details around the circumstances can be used to affect a decision involving the safety of our residents and our visitors on our Cobourg beach.

I urge all members of council to re-instate the lifeguards at Cobourg beach.

Yours Truly,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of several overlapping loops and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Robert & Brenda Picard