

Friday, March 21 2014

Dear Chair Carr, Mayor Burton, Mayor Goldring and Councillors:

When the Recreational Boating Feasibility and Capacity Study was announced the public was led to believe this was an independent study conducted, as all public announcements have said, jointly by the Region of Halton, the City of Burlington and the Town of Oakville. All public releases about the project state these three partners and list staff from these three entities as contacts.

However, it has come to our attention through a note written by John Birch, president of the LaSalle Park Marina Association, posted on a web forum, that you have had a silent partner in this study. That in fact, this shadow partner, the LPMA “are cofunding this \$43,000 Phase 1 study together with Burlington, Oakville and the Region. It is the best \$6,800 we have ever spent,” as Birch bragged on the website. Please read it for yourself here: <https://groups.google.com/forum/#!topic/BSBCNEWS/E3Sj8S2jWyA>

This is not how we expect our government to work. Citizens expect openness and transparency. These kind of backroom deals with a small group of boaters able to work behind the scenes using their money and influence to have an undue impact on what happens to a public park enjoyed by thousands of citizens, and a fragile species that is still trying to recover 30 years after its reintroduction, is simply not acceptable.

Moreover, by the very fact that the Region of Halton, the City of Burlington and the Town of Oakville concealed the LPMA’s involvement in this study lends credence to our belief that you knew it was wrong and wouldn’t stand up to public scrutiny.

If everything was above board, why would you not announce that there were four partners and that the LPMA was paying for 1/4 of the study?

Should we be surprised that the study, that was in part paid for by a private entity that wants to alter forever the public waterfront at LaSalle Park, found that there is a lack of marina capacity? Or that the study found that the wealthy, who are buying ever bigger pleasure boats, deem current marinas inadequate to meet the needs of their conspicuous consumption? Should we be surprised that, at an “Open” house for this project on December 5 2013 in Oakville, the first thing that was said at the meeting was that matters relating to LaSalle Park would not be up for discussion?

Hiding partnerships, not disclosing funding, forbidding discussion — these are not things that go over well with the public.

It’s bad enough that we have witnessed Councillors winking and giving the thumbs up to LPMA members at public meetings, that we have seen them rush out of the room to slap LPMA members on the back when they think no one is looking while we, who are standing up for citizens across the region and for a magnificent species that has been brought back from the brink of extinction, are mocked.

Why was the LPMA’s involvement in the study kept from the public? What do you intend to do to redress this? How do you intend to improve transparency?

We look forward to your response.

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