

Ombudsman to investigate closed meetings in Oshawa

TORONTO (May 23, 2008) – Ontario Ombudsman André Marin served notice to the mayor and council of the City of Oshawa this week that he is investigating a complaint about closed meetings held by city council. The complaint concerns allegations that meetings at which councillors discussed a plan to hire a consultant to lobby the federal government were improperly closed to the public.

A number of closed council sessions were held in January to discuss this issue, related to Oshawa's waterfront. Subsequently, council voted publicly to hire public relations firm Fleishman-Hillard Canada.

Details of the investigation, including the complainant's identity, remain confidential. A team of investigators will conduct interviews and gather all relevant evidence before the Ombudsman determines whether or not the complaint is warranted and whether he will issue recommendations. Generally, such investigations take 3-4 weeks.

The *Municipal Act* requires all meetings of municipal councils and committees to be open to the public, with a few narrow exceptions. As of Jan. 1, 2008, this law is enforced through a process of public complaints and investigations. Anyone who believes a meeting may have been improperly closed can file a complaint. The Ombudsman investigates such complaints in municipalities across Ontario that have chosen to use his services – as Oshawa has – and in all others that have not appointed their own investigators.

To date, the Ombudsman has completed and publicly reported on two closed meeting investigations – involving the town of Fort Erie and the city of Greater Sudbury. Both reports, as well as much more information about the municipal “sunshine law,” are available online at www.ombudsman.on.ca.

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