

# ⤴ **Ken Rubin: Wrestling with the NCC's culture of secrecy** (Ottawa Citizen August 25, 2015)

Digging for information about the powerful National Capital Commission began for me in the late 1960s. It included assisting community groups in the 1970s, getting data to try and combat NCC suggested plans for a massive Rideau Street redevelopment near the Canal.

That pursuit continued once Canada's Access to Information Act was in place in 1983 and allowed me to gain some access to NCC's decision-making minutes - from meetings that were held behind closed doors.

The NCC was none too happy with my monitoring their meetings and in 1986, cut me off from getting any NCC meeting minutes or attached reports, exempting everything in the minutes except publicly announced decisions.

So I had to go to federal court in 1987 with the assistance of the *Citizen* and argue in front of a judge that I should get the NCC to release records again.

I was successful and have persistently continued year after year to apply for NCC meeting minutes and other records.

Even though in November, 2007, the NCC was finally forced to open up parts of their meetings to the public, key matters are still reviewed in in-camera sessions, with sanitized summaries being released months late — and only because I file requests.

Sanitized as their records are, the value of uncovering matters of local interest can be found in the following items that resulted in *Citizen* stories:

- ⤴ 1988 consultant plans proposed for the parliamentary and judicial precinct were released after months of delays and an Information Commissioner complaint
- ⤴ secret 1989 discussions about introducing user fees at Gatineau Park
- ⤴ 1990 documents on delays and cost overruns associated with building a museum of photography next to the Chateau Laurier
- ⤴ 1992 records on the NCC's opposition to a popular idea of a park at the site of the former Daly building (the space now houses a luxury condominium, from which the NCC receives revenues)
- ⤴ 1988 to 1994 data that revealed the NCC was selling off chunks of its public greenbelt space to private developers
- ⤴ 1991 data on spending \$10,000 for the installation of condom dispensing machines at NCC public washrooms
- ⤴ 2002 records that revealed that the NCC had spent \$250,000 renovating an outdoor bathroom in Rockcliffe Park
- ⤴ a 1995 report by one Ottawa experienced appraisal firm that said the used sales value of furniture, furnishing, built-in closets and wallpaper left behind after the Mulroneys departing 24 Sussex Drive and Harrington Lake was only worth \$39,050 despite the NCC having paid the Mulroneys \$150,000 for these items in 1993
- ⤴ a 2003 investigation that mapped the incredibly vast capital area financial land holdings of NCC Chairman Marcel Beaudry and family and friends

▲ 2004 NCC data that showed the NCC's "competition" for developing phase one of the publicly owned LeBreton Flats space ended with Claridge Homes getting the project, even though they "qualified" in last place in the ratings.

These are examples of finding out what the NCC was none too keen to have made public. Yet the NCC still likes to decide key community matters behind closed doors, exempt matters it would prefer to keep hidden and delay others from early public input.

The continuation of its secrecy practices is once again demonstrated in its provision of minimal information about the four consortiums' January 2015 proposals for a large scale redevelopment anchor project at LeBreton Flats. My access request on this and other queries made by the *Citizen* remain unanswered.

The NCC may be its own worst enemy by being at times too secretive, arrogant and not wanting its track record as a developer known.

Nor has it helped matters that the NCC has itself been subject to hidden political interference that, once discovered as is the case on the location of the proposed memorial to the victims of communism, results in a public outcry.

The struggle to build a better capital and further open up and reform the less-than accountable and transparent NCC continues.

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