

Ken Rubin: A Recognized National Activist and Influencer Still Engaging in Local Issues

(published in August, 2026 at kenrubin.ca/advocacy work)

Ken Rubin is best known as an Ottawa-based award-winning national investigative researcher and transparency advocate.

But he began his public interest career in the late nineteen-sixties and early nineteen-seventies at the local Ottawa/national capital community level. There, he worked on inner city neighborhood planning and tenant issues.

That included being active in producing the neighbourhood plan and projects for the CenterTown Community Association where he sat on the board and wrote for the CentreTown News.

In addition, he produced two community self-studies for the Sandy Hill and Dalhousie neighborhoods and got involved in inner-city tenant problems. He also coordinated a community probe into Ottawa's less-than-sterling city recreation department.

As well, he threw himself into consumer advocacy work on safety, unfair pricing and privacy surveillance issues with several public interest groups.

This included spending a great deal of time and effort with the Automobile Protection Association on the lack of enforceable protections for problem lemon cars, with Action Bell Canada on poor telephone services, with Pollution Probe on junk foods and healthy and sustainable food alternatives, and with the National Capital Civil Liberties Association on invasive computer matching

and increasingly intrusive personal data linkages.

It was during this time too - starting in 1972 - that Rubin began documenting the follies and secretive nature of the unelected National Capital Commission (NCC) who held great influence on local area matters.

Particularly after the 1982 passage of the federal access to information act, he was able – but not without NCC resistance – to uncover many of the NCC’s wasteful, fanciful, and power-hungry schemes.

Another long-time local probe documented the behind-the-scenes corporate pitches to the city of Ottawa for Lansdowne Park redevelopment.

It began with Rubin helping organize a 1974 Ontario Municipal Board appeal by surrounding neighbourhood community groups in opposition to the proposed southern football stadium seat expansion plans by a private sports owner and real estate developer. However, that community appeal failed.

When another corporate sports and real estate group came forward in 2008 with further redevelopment plans for Lansdowne Park, he helped dig up data on the Lansdowne Park decision making, suspect cost estimates, and the unworkable parts of their transportation plans.

But their development plans went ahead in 2012 with the city of Ottawa awarding them sole-source rights to redo the arena area and build a real estate big-box store area.

That same group came back in 2022 for more concessions to further rebuild the arena area - taking over remaining green space, and with plans to put up two out-of-place large high rises.

That's despite not having given taxpayers the promised stage-one revenues and using questionable financial figures for their stage-two redevelopment plans - called Lansdowne 2.0.

Again, in 2025, that corporate group got approval for its plans, and started in 2026 tearing down some existing buildings and using green space.

But the local probe by far that Rubin is best known for was his research and resulting stories in the Ottawa Citizen in the 2017-19 period exposing the many phase-one Confederation Line light-rail transit (LRT) start-up problems.

Those poorly-thought-out and over budget plans of the city of Ottawa in sole-source partnership with corporate firms resulted in train stop stations building in faulty concrete, welding and water leakages, using ill-suited never-tried-out-before train cars with faulty wheels, building unsuitable curving train tracks, and adopting having not-always functioning overhead wiring.

Such a controversial badly planned - rushed procurement with too many in experienced private and public sector managers, without even meeting qualified technical standards, and managed by greedy corporate interests and a controlling overbearing mayor - led to a provincial inquiry being called.

At the inquiry, in 2022, as one of several community intervenors, Rubin testified on how the lack of transparency contributed to the

LRT technical, economic and political disaster which Ottawa still lives with today.

He also provided the inquiry with newer documents on inept senior governments' monitoring of the millions they poured into financing Ottawa's line-one LRT and advanced for the LRT line-two expansion line.

Various other local research investigations he did uncovered information ranging from eye-opening daycare inspection reports to data about a community college president getting excessive extra thousands of dollars in retirement benefits.

Those findings resulted in media stories and in opinion columns that Rubin did for the Ottawa Citizen and The Hill Times.

As already noted, some of the issues he was involved in with local groups combined doing action research with community organizing.

One such further effort in the early nineteen-nineties was his setting up with others Ottawa's first environment umbrella group - Ecovision.

Ecovision, during its few years' existence, investigated and spoke up and fought for retaining area wetlands threatened by developer plans. This watchdog group was the forerunner of the Ottawa Ecology citizen group who still exists today.

A recent, most significant, impactful, and unique project Rubin founded, along with others, began in 2022 as a reaction and response to the occupation of downtown Ottawa neighbourhoods by a protesting truckers' convoy whose noise and intimidation tactics

disrupted and upset inner-city neighborhoods.

The grass root group created a people's commission that held hearings for traumatized city residents that helped in their healing and recovery from the chaos by the truckers whose actions interfered with their daily lives.

The people's commission issued reports with findings and recommendations that were covered by the media but soon forgotten.

Parallel to this community work, he with his wife and partner, Debbie Rubin, were continuing to operate a capital area farm, supplying local eateries and food banks with organic vegetables, herbs, and early on, with cut flowers as well.

Yet even there the community work continued. A good example of this in 1999 was his organization of a widely- publicized chefs' protest in Ottawa and other cities against the use of genetic engineered foods and the lack of labelling for such produce.

He dug up data as well government – approved genetic food crop pilot projects being carried out by Monsanto and other companies including at government agriculture experimental research farms.

Also uncovered, and supplied to the Ottawa Citizen and the Globe and Mail were documents revealing how the lobbying efforts of the food industry grossly tilted and influenced what the Canadian Food Guide suggested as “healthy” eating. The government giving misleading nutrition advice greatly upset many people.

Also set up with Debbie in 1999 was another community-related endeavour - through the Ottawa Community Foundation - the Ken

and Debbie Rubin Public Interest Advocacy Fund.

Their fund to date has given out over a hundred grants, many of which were for a wide variety of local as well as regional and national projects.

Local grants include funding for an Ottawa Riverkeepers project lobbying municipalities for better sewage management, and one for the Acorn tenant group to campaign against payday loan companies' predatory loan practices.

But what attracted local and media attention was one very special donation given in 2021-22.

That the Rubins' eco-gifting their farm property - located next to the Gatineau Park - to Acre Land Trust.

This created in perpetua an area eco-reserve protecting endangered species on the property and the area's biodiversity, preventing its nearly 15 hectares from being one more area housing development.

Now known as Place Eco Rubin, and managed by Acre Land Trust and a local stewardship committee that the Rubins sit on, its milestones to date include planting 10,000 native trees in the back and starting a pollinator garden in the front area.

One local reporter observed that the Rubin's eco-gifting of their farm seemed only natural when done by someone like activist access to information guru Ken Rubin.

The gifting could be seen as further evidence of their roles in helping reshape the capital area into a more sustainable, transparent, and just

place.

Much of Ken Rubin's wide-ranging public interest work can be found at kenrubin.ca

Ken Rubin is reachable via kenrubin.ca