

Implications of the “New Gang” of Non-Respondent Councillors Ignoring Calls to Improve Trust, Transparency, Accountability, and Public Access to Public Records

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*Interim Report 28, Research Project Chronicling the Use of
Transparency and Accountability as Political Buzzwords, or as
Drivers Ensuring the Standard of Access to Public Records in
Canada Is Best Practice*

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“Increasing trust, transparency and accountability [is] a tremendous priority for me.” Comment by Mayor Mark Sutcliffe, City of Ottawa, published in the Ottawa Citizen, August 23, 2023.

A. Background

The research project, [Chronicling the Use of Transparency and Accountability as Political Buzzwords, and as Drivers Ensuring the Standard of Access to Public Records in Canada is Best Practice](#), commenced in 2019.

To the date of this publication, five surveys have been administered in which City of Ottawa council members during the terms 2018-2022 and 2022-2026 are asked,

Do you agree that citizens are entitled to free, easy, timely, and direct online access to public records?

Published survey reports to date are:

- [Interim Report 2. Responses of City of Ottawa Mayor and Councillors to the Question: Do You Agree that Citizens Are Entitled to Free, Easy, Timely, and Direct Online Access to the Public Records Held by the City of Ottawa?](#)
- [Interim Report 3. Using Transparency and Accountability as Political Buzzwords, and as Drivers Ensuring Access to Public Records in Canada Is Best Practice, Ottawa Council Score: Political Buzzwords, 87.5%; Drivers, 12.5%](#)
- [Interim Report 8. Second Survey Asking City of Ottawa Mayor and Councillors, Do you agree that citizens are entitled to free, easy, timely, and direct online access to the public records held by the City of Ottawa?](#)
- [Interim Report 9. Using Transparency and Accountability as Political Buzzwords, and as Drivers Ensuring Access to Public Records in Canada is Best Practice: Ottawa Council Rating after the Second Citizen Access Survey–Political Buzzwords, 79%; Drivers, 21%](#)
- [Interim Report 16. Third Survey Asking City of Ottawa Mayor and Councillors, Do you agree that citizens are entitled to free, easy, timely, and direct online access to the public records held by the City of Ottawa?](#)
- [Interim Report 17. Using Transparency and Accountability as Political Buzzwords, and as Drivers Ensuring Access to Public Records in Canada is Best Practice: Ottawa Council Rating after the Third Citizen Access Survey–Political Buzzwords, 79%; Drivers, 21%](#)

- [Interim Report 22. City of Ottawa Mayor and Councillors, 2022-2026: Do You Agree that Citizens Are Entitled to Free, Easy, Timely, and Direct Online Access to the Public Records Held by the City of Ottawa? Survey #1](#)
- [Interim Report 23. Analysis and Implications of Survey #1, City of Ottawa Mayor and Councillors, 2022-2026: Do You Agree that Citizens Are Entitled to Free, Easy, Timely, and Direct Online Access to the Public Records Held by the City of Ottawa?](#)
- [Interim Report 25. City of Ottawa Mayor and Councillors, 2022-2026: Do You Agree that Citizens Are Entitled to Free, Easy, Timely, and Direct Online Access to the Public Records Held by the City of Ottawa? Survey #2](#)
- [Interim Report 26. Events Between Survey #1 and Survey #2 Which Could Affect City of Ottawa Politicians’ Respect for Trust, Transparency, and Accountability, or Citizens’ Access to Public Records](#)
- [Interim Report 27. Implications of the “Old Gang” of Non-Respondent Councillors Ignoring Calls to Improve Trust, Transparency, Accountability, and Public Access to Public Records](#)

Interim Report 25 presented the results of administering survey #2 to the 15 members of the 2022-2026 City of Ottawa council who did not respond yes to survey #1, and again are asked,

Do you agree that citizens are entitled to free, easy, timely, and direct online access to public records?

However, as context before comparing the results of survey #2 to the results of survey #1 for differences and identifying possible trends, the research design introduced an intervening step.

Interim report 26 considers whether any political, institutional, inter-governmental, jurisdictional, legislative, legal, or other factors affecting transparency, accountability, trust, and access to public records in the City of Ottawa differ significantly between survey #1 and survey #2.

The research concern is that significant differences in one or more of those factors could affect the survey results and, therefore, the validity of analyses undertaken and implications drawn.

If such differences, occurred then it is necessary to incorporate them in the research design so that we might better understand the reasons, causes, forces, meaning, etc., behind changes or lack of changes in the results between survey #1 and survey #2.

As demonstrated in interim report 26, many significant events promoting public access to City of Ottawa records occurred between survey #1 and survey #2. Consequently, it logically seems to follow, there should have been a reduction in the number of non-respondents to the question,

Do you agree that citizens are entitled to free, easy, timely, and direct online access to public records?

And, conversely, numerous keyword-based scans of the popular, governance, professional, and learned literatures did not identify significant events between survey #1 and survey #2 which could be cause for the number of non-respondents to decide to continue their behaviour of not responding to a question about public access to City of Ottawa records. (1)

B. Core Research Question, Interim Report 27 and Interim Report 28

After two surveys the core research question for interim reports 27 and 28 is,

How close is the 2022-2026 City of Ottawa council to agreeing that citizens are entitled to free, easy, timely, and direct online access to City of Ottawa public records?

Or, to re-phrase,

How close is the 2022-2026 City of Ottawa to using the terms transparency and accountability as drivers to ensure public access to public records is best practice?

And, in association with the core question and its variation, we begin to explore the related question,

What are the implications of the answer to the core research question? That is, what are the implications for citizens of non-respondent councillors ignoring calls to improve trust, transparency, accountability, and public access to public records.

We know from the first survey of the 2022-2026 council that 10 of 25 council members – Bradley, Brockington, Brown, Devine, Johnson, Kavanagh, King, Kitts, Luloff, and Menard – agree that citizens are entitled to free, easy, timely, and direct online access to City of Ottawa public records. And that ratio now stands at 11 of 25 with the addition of Councillor Ariel Troster after survey #2.

What we are investigating, therefore, is the likelihood and implications of movement among the 14 non-respondents, and part of this investigation includes ascertaining whether there are forces at work within Ottawa city hall which could promote or impede

decisions by these members of council to agree that citizens are entitled to free, easy, timely, and direct online access to City of Ottawa public records.

As to the pertinence of the core research question to all members of council, we turn to the mandate of the Finance and Corporate Services Committee.

<https://ottawa.ca/en/city-hall/council-committees-and-boards/committees-and-boards/standing-committees-commissions-sub-committees-and-other/finance-and-corporate-services-committee#section-b4980547-f75d-418e-b8a8-68add67a9050>

One of the specific responsibilities of this committee is that of communications and organizational development, and item 11 in particular:

11. Oversee and make recommendations to Council on the City's communications goals, strategies and methods for providing timely and accurate information to residents.

The term “information” is not defined as part of the text, so the meaning of “information” is not specified.

Further, since Google searches yield about 25,300,000,000 webpages for “information”, including some 25,000 for “wellar and information”, it is by no means evident what the City of Ottawa includes and excludes in its reference to “information”. The phrase “clear as mud” comes to mind.

To deal with that uncertainty, the *Chronicling* project refers to “records” which include text, image, and other productions created by reality > data > information > knowledge transform processes, and incorporates “information”, whatever it may be deemed to be, into the package of records. **(2)**

As a result, the survey question *Do you agree that citizens are entitled to free, easy, timely, and direct online access to public records?* is totally consistent with the responsibility of the Finance and Corporate Services Committee to “Oversee and make recommendations to Council on the City’s communications goals, strategies and methods for providing timely and accurate information to residents.”

Further, asking committee members *Do you agree that citizens are entitled to free, easy, timely, and direct online access to public records?* is also totally consistent with their responsibility to “Oversee and make recommendations to Council on the City’s communications goals, strategies and methods for providing timely and accurate information to residents.”

And, finally, all the events selected for this report have an information element, but with a twist that is totally within the purview of all members of this committee, including Mayor Mark Sutcliffe.

That is, for all events selected for this report, preliminary investigations did not yield sufficient meta-data or meta-information documentation to ascertain how purported information is derived by the City of Ottawa.

Consequently, the survey question is pertinent because it does not take at face value claims that information provided by the City of Ottawa is sufficient to establish grounds for transparency, accountability, and trust.

Rather, the question pertains to all public records including data and meta-data, as well as information and meta-information, which are needed for various citizen oversight activities including the validation of claims about transparency and accountability.

On the one hand, then, we have the core question,

How close is the 2022-2026 City of Ottawa council to agreeing that citizens are entitled to free, easy, timely, and direct online access to City of Ottawa public records?

and, on the other hand we have the charge to the Finance and Corporate Services Committee to

Oversee and make recommendations to Council on the City’s communications goals, strategies and methods for providing timely and accurate information to residents.

Section D uses summaries of the 10 events presented in interim report 26 to critique the contributions of members of the Finance and Corporate Services Committee to answering the core question.

C. “Old Gang” v. “New Gang” Distinction Among Survey Non-Respondents

At this stage, three surveys have been administered to the 2018-2022 council and two surveys to the 2022-2026 council, for a total of five surveys sent to those on both councils, and two surveys sent to those on the current council.

The *Chronicling* project is in the pilot study phase of methodologically designed research phase, so the temporal feature is deemed sufficient to classify the non-respondents into two camps.

That is, given their record of non-responses to date, it would be a waste of time and effort to ask the 14 non-respondents substantive questions of a political or professional nature to sort them into two groups for two reports.

However, what we can already ascertain with certainty using the temporal variable is which non-respondents were and are on which councils, and were and are on which committees, with whom, for how long.

That information in combination with their non-response records appears more than sufficient to draw the kinds of inferences that can lead to preliminary but informed findings to the questions,

How close is the 2022-2026 City of Ottawa council to agreeing that citizens are entitled to free, easy, timely, and direct online access to City of Ottawa public records?

And,

What are the implications of the answer to the core research question?

As a result, the “old gang” consists of members of both councils:

- Councillor Cathy Curry/Jenna Sudds **(3)**
- Councillor George Darouze
- Councillor Laura Dudas
- Councillor Allan Hublely
- Councillor Glen Gower
- Councillor Jeff Leiper
- Councillor Tim Tierney.

These people have been on council for all or parts of two terms, and it seems reasonable that they would have encountered item 11 matters many hundreds of times per month, which adds up to many, many thousands of encounters during their municipal political careers to date.

And the “new gang” consists of members of the current council:

- Mayor Mark Sutcliffe
- Councillor Marty Carr
- Councillor Steve Desroches

- Councillor David Hill
- Councillor Clarke Kelly
- Councillor Wilson Lo
- Councillor Stéphanie Plante.

These people have been on council for about 18 months, and it seems reasonable that they would have encountered item 11 matters many hundreds of times per month, which adds up to many thousands of encounters during their municipal political careers to date.

The “old gang” is the subject of interim report 27, and the “new gang” is the subject of interim report 28.

D. Summaries of the Significant Events Identified in Interim Report 26 Which Should Have Increased the Number of New Gang Members of Council Who Agreed in Survey #2 that Citizens Are Entitled to Free, Easy, Timely, and Direct Online Access to Public Records

For the convenience of readers, the 10 events discussed in detail in interim report 26 are summarized. The events are used as the criteria for assessing the degree to which each councillor is committed to her or his non-response position, forecasting the consequent likelihood that council will move away from its current non-response position of 14-11, and deriving the implications that follow as a result of the commitments by individual councillors and council as a group.

For each event a comment explains why the event should have caused a non-respondent to survey #1 to change her/his position by the time of survey #2, and agree that citizens are entitled to free, easy, timely, and online access to public records.

Separately and collectively the comments advise on assessing how close members of council and council are to shifting away from the non-response majority position of 14-11 to a majority “Yes” position of 13-12.

Event 1. Report of the Ottawa Light Rail Transit (OLTR) Public Inquiry

For weeks on end, the Hourigan inquiry pummelled members of Ottawa council who could be associated in any way with the communications muck-up that enveloped the Ottawa light rail program, and totally repudiated any claims to trust, transparency, and accountability by those politicians. A core feature of the pummelling was the failure by Mayor Jim Watson and his council supporters to ensure that all members of council and citizens had proper access to public records, namely, the LRT file.

https://www.archives.gov.on.ca/en/e_records/OLRTPI/documents/final-report/index.html)

Comment. The Hourigan Inquiry laid bare the reasons behind the massive loss of respect, regard, and reputation, and the high level of lasting recrimination that befalls municipal politicians who engage in bad, worse, or worst practices involving a major matter of public trust, transparency, and accountability.

Given the message of the Hourigan Inquiry, it is a struggle to comprehend why any member of the new gang would have taken the non-response route for survey #1, much, much less for survey #2. The concept of ideological rigidity comes to mind as perhaps one of the characteristics of such anti-trust, anti-transparency, and anti-accountability behaviour.

Event 2. Email to Mark Sutcliffe re ‘Cone of Silence’, Rideau Transit Group (RTG) File

Less than three months of taking office, the council of Mayor Mark Sutcliffe continued the cone of silence pattern of Jim Watson regarding the OLRT file by keeping secret from citizens the details of a financial settlement deal worked out between a group of city officials and Rideau Transit Group, one of the participants in the OLRT program,

Comment. City of Ottawa politicians and staff were criticized and ridiculed to the point of humiliation by the Hourigan Inquiry and by social media comments for weeks on end during the 2018-2022 term about institution-wide failures of trust, transparency, and accountability.

Central to the criticism and ridicule was an abject failure to properly inform citizens or enable citizens to inform themselves. For the new council to continue that pattern into 2022-2026, seemingly without missing a beat just after the previous council had left the building in a cloak of shame, has been suggested as the basis for a class-action-type code of conduct complaint:

One core question among municipal watchers is, “What is the new council hiding from taxpayers about the LRT contract financial mess?” If nothing is being hidden, in the names of transparency, accountability, and trust, **OPEN THE BOOKS!**

Event 3. Emails informing Mayor Sutcliffe and councillors of publications reporting on City of Ottawa Council contributions to research on Best Practice Standards for Citizens’ Access to Spatial Records Held by Local Governments

Within a year of assuming office, the 2022-2026 council was informed that its standard of public access to spatial records, which are about 80% of all City of Ottawa records, would be discussed as a case study presentation for an international conference.

Council was also informed that the City of Ottawa was on the negative side of the practices ledger, that is, it is rated as worst, worse, or bad relative to other cities regarding the quality of access citizens have to Ottawa’s spatial records.

Comment. Ottawa’s municipal politicians have frequently referred to Ottawa as a “world-class city”, and “world-class” could reasonably be equated with best practices for whatever topic is under discussion. **(4)**

However, if no objection is made by mayor or councillors to the argument that the City of Ottawa is at the bad, worse, or worst practices level when it comes to providing citizens access to spatial records, then it could be taken that these politicians:

- a. Do not know the difference and do not care,
- b. Do know the difference and do not care.

There could be an alternate explanation but, in the absence of any response to the communications, it appears fair to say that mention of “world-class” by members of this council must be accompanied by a very large asterisk noting that access to spatial records is excluded.

Further, because proper access to spatial records is key for citizens to hold politicians to standards of trust, transparency, and accountability set by citizens, numerous questions arise among municipal watchers regarding the thinking, motives, competence, ethics, morals, etc., of municipal politicians to not agree that citizens are entitled to best practice-level access to the spatial records held by the City of Ottawa.

Event 4. Ottawa Mayor Mark Sutcliffe declares at a media event announcing Wendy Stephenson as Ottawa’s new city manager that “increasing trust, transparency, and accountability is an enormous priority.”

Events 1, 2, and 3 are part of the political backdrop to event 4, in that Sutcliffe’s predecessor Jim Watson is criticized multiple times in Hourigan inquiry productions as well as in broadcast media and social media productions for not properly informing council and, by extension, citizens, regarding all manner of transparency, accountability, and trust shortcomings, errors, failings, etc., etc., regarding the massively bungled LRT file.

Further, events 1, 2, and 3 are also part of the professional, administrative, legal, operational, and technical backdrop to event 4 at the staff level, because Stephenson’s predecessor Steve Kanellakos was also criticized in Hourigan inquiry productions for all manner of transparency, accountability, and trust shortcomings, errors, failings, etc., etc., regarding the massively bungled LRT file.

The bottom line is that municipal politicians from the 2018-2022 council failed to hold staff to account, and while some of that gang left office some did not and are members of the 2022-2026 “old gang” who did not respond to the survey about citizens’ access to public records, that is, Curry, Darouze, Dudas, Gower, Hubley, Leiper, and Tierney.

It is therefore reasonable to surmise that each and every new member of council must have more than a passing clue that the LRT disaster was a motivating factor behind Sutcliffe’s remark about restoring and improving the states of transparency, accountability, and trust at Ottawa city hall.

And it is also reasonable to surmise that everyone in the new gang of non-respondents (Councillors Carr, Desroches, Hill, Kelly, Lo, and Plante) is fully aware that if Sutcliffe is not inventing the need to restore and improve transparency, accountability, and trust, then that need could be attributable in part to old gang non-respondents still on council, that is, Councillors Curry, Darouze, Dudas, Gower, Hubley, Leiper, and Tierney.

Regardless of the precise nature Sutcliffe’s motivation which seems to be unknown by citizens **(5)**, let us give Sutcliffe the benefit of doubt and assume that when he expressed the position that restoring and increasing trust, transparency, and accountability was a matter of tremendous priority for him, he was committing himself to move council and staff to the standard of best practice in providing citizens the best of the best access to City of Ottawa. **(6)**

Once again, we turn to what members of the new gang knew and when they should have known it.

Based on Ottawa’s record of discipline over the past twenty years it seems that new councillors should have known to have all due regard for a proclamation by the mayor that **“increasing trust, transparency, and accountability is a tremendous priority.”**

Further, given the “go along with the mayor” attitude which characterizes municipal councils in this area and many others in Ontario. it seems likely that very few councillors would reject a public pronouncement from their current head of council about “tremendous priority”.

However, they did exactly that in survey #2 by not responding Yes to a question about public access to public records, which is a necessary condition of restoring and increasing public trust through meeting levels of transparency and accountability set by citizens.

All to say that on its face this kind of behaviour by members of the new gang repudiates calls to improve trust, transparency, accountability, and public access to public records, and has deeply negative implications for Sutcliffe and citizens.

Event 5. Search for Mayor Sutcliffe’s plan of action for him and council to restore and increase trust, transparency, and accountability.

An email sent a week after the “pep talk” interview asked Mayor Sutcliffe,

“... what practices have been or are identified, and their schedules for adoption and implementation by council to improve citizens access to the evidence needed to establish the validity of claims about trust, transparency and accountability which are achieved by you and other members of the City of Ottawa 2022-2026 council.”

Comment. Feedback on this event uses phrases such “All talk and no action”, “Sutcliffe talks the talk but doesn’t walk the walk”, “Practice what you preach”, and, “Declaring principles without also declaring how to implement them in practice is cheap political theatre” to describe Sutcliffe’s failure and that of council to ensure citizens that they are not going to endure more of the hollow gestures that characterize the Watson council of 2018-2022.

Bearing in mind that members of the new gang would have seen the old gang go down this road the previous term (7), and are the “newbies” in town, one might think that each of them including Sutcliffe would be pushing hard in public and during council and committee meetings to get a clear understanding of how council is going to restore and improve trust, transparency and accountability.

However, no evidence has been found that any of Sutcliffe, Carr, Desroches, Hill, Kelly, Lo, or Plante did anything in public or at council or committee meetings to address the negative implications for citizens already identified by events 1, 2, 3, and 4.

A cone of silence and inaction 2.0, you might say.

Event 6. Letter to Editor, Ottawa Citizen, Asking Mayor Sutcliffe about plans to act on promises of restoring and increasing transparency, accountability, and trust.

It was my hope that a quick broadcast media follow-up to the story published August 23 (event 4 and event 5) would motivate Mayor Mark Sutcliffe to shift himself, councillors, and new city manager Wendy Stephanson into high gear, and provide details on how he and they are going to deliver on his “tremendous priority” promise about restoring and increasing trust, transparency, and accountability.

A letter to the Editor, Ottawa Citizen, “Three Questions on Transparency”, was published a week later, on Saturday Sept. 2, 2023.

<https://ottawacitizen.com/opinion/todays-letters-24-sussex-drive-is-part-of-our-history-preserve-it>

The third question asks “... what are you doing to ensure that citizens have proper access to the evidence needed to establish that claims about trust, transparency and accountability are the real deal and not just empty rhetoric?”

Comment. It is now about seven months later and still nothing from Sutcliffe, which suggests that there was nothing substantive from the outset. If the case was otherwise, then surely Sutcliffe would have made much of his noble claim about restoring and improving trust, transparency, and accountability being a tremendous priority for him.

Moreover, seven months passed and still nothing from new gang members Carr, Desroches, Hill, Kelly, Lo, or Plante, which prompts questions such as “What are you waiting for?”, or “If you won’t stand up for trust, transparency and accountability, why are you on a municipal council?”

Again, the implications are negative for citizens seeking signs of politicians’ actions to improve trust, transparency, accountability, and public access to public records, with the new gang seemingly complicit members of the do-nothing stance.

Event 7. Less than a month after Mayor and City Manager went all in about trust, a story breaks calling for an audit of new land parcels.

A news story regarding the need for an audit to investigate decisions involving the creation of new land parcels was a timely opportunity for Mayor Sutcliffe, council, and the new city manager to demonstrate how they are putting into effect the promises made to restore and increase trust, transparency, and accountability.

Alas it was not to happen, with a major cause for inaction being Mayor Mark Sutcliffe for a statement attributed to him that he is not interested in revisiting past decisions.

On its face the statement is beyond bizarre, because most decisions made by this council and any other council are derived from and/or affected by decisions made by prior councils.

This kind of stick-your-head-in-the-sand-and-deny-reality approach makes a mockery of notions about restoring and improving trust, transparency, and accountability.

Further, the declaration attributed to Sutcliffe must surely have created a sense of wonderment for members of the new gang because each of them must have been smart enough to figure out that council and committees re-visit prior matters at most every single meeting.

And yet, there is no sign that any of the new gang raised this matter for the record, seemingly along the lines of a getting-along-by-going-along-with-the-mayor’s approach by keeping a low profile.

The idiom, *plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose*, comes to mind in terms of the negative implications arising from the failure by Sutcliffe and this council to respond in detail to queries about yet another development deal which prompts a lot of questions without answers or proper access to records.

Event 8. News item about improper lobbying by staff for a dirt dump: How does that action square with restoring and increasing trust, transparency, and accountability, and applying the code of conduct or other professional standards to affected staff?

This news item prompts recall of staff engagement in the LRT boondoggle, leads to comments about ‘same old, same old’, and deeply diminishes claims by Mayor Mark Sutcliffe and City Manager Wendy Stephanson about restoring trust, transparency, and accountability.

Moreover, this is far from a casual chit-chat matter because of its negative implications and connotations for registered professional planners (RPPs) and geographic information system professionals (GISPs), as well as code of conduct concerns for politicians or staff associated with improper lobbying activities of any kind. **(8)**

Based on their earlier declarations (event 4) just three months previously, it is expected that Sutcliffe and Stephanson attach tremendous priority to building on the Auditor General’s report and informing citizens at the best practices level to restore and increase trust, transparency, and accountability at Ottawa city hall.

Further, it is reasonable to expect that members of the new gang would step up with words and actions to support or push Sutcliffe and Stephanson to deliver on their promises about trust, transparency, and accountability.

However, it appears that did not happen, that is, I did not find evidence than anyone in the new gang stepped up to deliver the trust, transparency and accountability pledges of Sutcliffe or Stephanson by championing an investigation into the lobbying by staff issue.

I hasten to add that legal, criminal, or other proceedings could be unfolding but, again, I have not been able to access any files in that regard.

Event 9. Does Lansdowne 2.0 pass the smell test for trust, transparency, and accountability? Or, to re-phrase, if developers are not complaining then should taxpayers be alarmed about sweet deals for the developers?

The redevelopment of Lansdowne Park has been a topic of discussion by Ottawa’s regional and municipal councils for decades, with a lot of that discussion along the lines of two constants.

First, records of sound, evidence-based financial, economic, transit, traffic, heritage, etc., arguments have not been located, much less received in response to communications.

Second, council after council failed to properly inform citizens about what it was intending and why, with numerous unanswered questions hanging in the air about who pays for and who benefits from whatever is proposed.

Comment. Anyone who has been paying attention and has an analytical mind knows the history of Lansdowne development conflicts, and the contentious nature of this development proposal – e.g., a large amount of public money involved (more than \$400 million and that is likely a lowball number); fuzzy notions about shifting the affordable housing component to some other area; even fuzzier notions about the amount of funding to be allocated; very problematic private motor vehicle and transit transportation and traffic issues; and loss of greenspace.

It is therefore reasonable to expect that members of the new gang would not want to engage in Lansdowne messes of the last term, and would strive mightily, tremendously even, to ensure that citizens have all the information they need, when it is needed, in order to put trust, transparency, and accountability totally up front to mitigate concerns that this council is fronting for the developer(s).

Emails to Sutcliffe generated no responses, and by disregarding such communications Sutcliffe makes a mockery of his promises to restore and increase trust, transparency, and accountability.

Members of the new gang have been around long enough to realize that things are not computing, and that by their complicity they are now part of the communications problem.

Event 10. Does rezoning a chunk of the Central Experimental Farm (CEF) pass the smell test for trust, transparency, and accountability at Ottawa city hall? Or, to rephrase, if developers are not complaining, then should taxpayers be alarmed about a sweet deal for the CEF 2.0 development proponents?

The place of the Central Experimental Farm (CEF) in Ottawa’s urban fabric has been a topic of political, planning, development, and zoning discussions at the municipal level in Ottawa for decades.

Like Lansdowne Park redevelopment proposals and propositions, mention of CEF lands were and still are characterized by two constants.

First, records of sound, “data-driven”, evidence-based financial, economic, transit, traffic, heritage, etc., arguments have not been located, much less received in response to communications. **(9)**

Second, CEF development proponents fail to properly inform citizens about what they are intending and why, with numerous unanswered questions hanging in the air about who pays for and who benefits from whatever is proposed, bearing in mind that CEF is a national research facility situated in an inward-looking local government setting.

Comment. Email communications to Mayor Mark Sutcliffe and members of the new gang include one regarding my Letter to the Editor, Ottawa Citizen, Saturday February 17, 2024, *Don’t cast shade on the Experimental Farm.*

[\(https://drbarrywellar.wordpress.com/2024/02/17/professor-wellar-on-the-baseline-towers/\)](https://drbarrywellar.wordpress.com/2024/02/17/professor-wellar-on-the-baseline-towers/)

In the interests of transparency and accountability, Sutcliffe and councillors were asked to respond by email to nine requests for information dealing with the planning principle of highest and best use of land. Four items are recalled for illustrative purposes regarding the matter of highest and best use:

1. I cannot locate any references to the highest and best use planning principle in any of the published documentation. If such references exist, please provide the link(s) to that/those reference(s).
2. If the highest and best use principle is referenced, what use did you make of it in the council decision to approve the two highrise towers on Baseline Road that cast shade over part of the Experimental Farm?
3. If the highest and best use planning principle is not referenced, what planning principles in what order of priority were used to make a decision which, on its face, prompts comments among citizens about developer bias?

4. What is the ‘good planning’ rationale for approving the two-tower proposal which, due to excessive height is cause for a shade problem affecting crop research on sections of the Experimental Farm?

No response was received from Sutcliffe, or any member of the new gang, which is the explanation I give to area residents and researchers from away who ask about responses from any member of council to the letter to the editor, Ottawa Citizen.

The negative implications of this cone of silence stance for citizen access to city records cannot be overstated given that Sutcliffe and 23 councillors came up with nothing in reply, even though Sutcliffe announced the previous August the **tremendous priority** he attaches to trust, transparency, and accountability.

Further, nothing was said about planning staff regarding the criticism that council failed to have due regard for the planning principle of highest and best use.

Part of the news story in event 4 warrants repeating.

(<https://ottawacitizen.com/news/local-news/wendy-stephanson-named-ottawas-new-city-manager>)

“[City manager] Stephanson echoed the mayor, saying she planned a three-pronged approach: good communication, increased transparency and providing reliable service.

I talked about how important it was to restore trust, not only with our residents, but with council as well, Stephanson told reporters.

It’s going to take time, there’s no question, and we’re taking steps towards that. I hope everybody sees that”.

There are no details about the steps to be taken to restore and improve trust, transparency, and accountability, and to my knowledge none of the new gang including Sutcliffe ever reported on what steps have been taken over the past eight months.

E. Using the Events to Assess the Implications for Citizens of Politicians’ Non-Responses to the Survey Question

The ten events occurred between survey #1 and survey #2, and the research posit is that singularly and in combination the cited events should have been more than sufficient to cause members of the new gang to change their positions from non-response to Yes regarding the survey question.

However, that did not happen, and this section explores the implications for citizens of those events not causing changes in positions held by new gang Mayor Mark Sutcliffe and Councillors Carr, Desroches, Hill, Kelly, Lo, and Plante.

It is recalled for context that these people did not respond to communications, including surveys. Further, there is no reason to expect that any member of the new gang would consent to a recorded interview, or another survey.

As a result, the events are used to make inferences about the implications of the non-responses for citizens. I hasten to add and emphasize, again, that this process would have been simplified had the non-respondents said Yes, or No as the case may be, because a No would have led to questions about the reason behind the No and inferencing would not be required.

Mayor Mark Sutcliffe, 0/2

The appropriate place to start with Mayor Mark Sutcliffe is his pronouncement made between survey #1 and survey #2, and repeated numerous times in interim reports 26, 27, and 28:

“Increasing trust, transparency and accountability [is] a tremendous priority for me.” Comment by Mayor Mark Sutcliffe, City of Ottawa, published in the Ottawa Citizen, August 23, 2023.

The implications of this pronouncement for citizens being provided free, easy, timely, and direct online access to City of Ottawa records during this term of council are two-fold and are of major significance whichever way matters unfold.

On the one hand, if Sutcliffe says what he means and means what he says, and delivers on what he says, then the implications are positive for citizens. That is, by design under Sutcliffe’s leadership the City of Ottawa will move the access to public records needle away from worst access practices towards best access practices by a tremendous degree.

What we know if Sutcliffe delivers, is that the state of access in practice will be an improvement over that which the 2018-2022 council left behind. How much of an improvement remains to be determined, as does the location of the City of Ottawa on the worst > worse > bad > good > better > best spectrum relative to other municipalities.

And, on the other hand, if Sutcliffe does not deliver on his promise, then the implications are negative for citizens.

That is, if the City of Ottawa moves the access to public records needle away from worst access practices towards best access practices, it will not be by the design and leadership of Mayor Mark Sutcliffe since he will have failed on his proclamation.

What we know about the state of access in this scenario is that improvements in transparency and accountability will be constrained due to Sutcliffe’ inaction, which means access will be constrained because it is driven by what is done to restore and improve respect for transparency, accountability, and trust.

As for the implications of the events and related matters, they are outlined as follows since they have been addressed in depth in previous reports.

1. By not responding to surveys Sutcliffe fails to hold himself to conditions of transparency and accountability, which makes a mockery of his proclamation, **“Increasing trust, transparency and accountability [is] a tremendous priority for me.”**

2. The ten events speak forcefully and unequivocally. That is, in every case Sutcliffe ducked his obligation to demonstrate that he knows and respects the meanings of transparency and accountability as they apply to all members of a municipal council, and especially to the mayor as leader of council.

The term “buzzword” used in previous Chronicling reports fits Sutcliffe to a “T”.

3. Sutcliffe is chair of council, chair of the Finance and Corporate Services Committee, a member of the Police Services Board, and an *ex officio* member of numerous committees and boards. In those positions he has many hundreds of opportunities every week to walk the talk on the transparency, accountability, and trust files.

And, he has just as many or more opportunities to demonstrate his sincerity in practical terms by systematically working to ensure improvements in citizens’ access to City of Ottawa records.

However, no evidence has been received or located to affirm that he did anything substantive between survey #1 and survey # 2 to advance the case of restoring and improving transparency, accountability, trust, or public access to public records.

4. Politicians at all levels of government are chastised, criticized, derided, disparaged, jeered, lampooned, mocked, ridiculed and taunted for language variously described by terms such as affected, bafflegab, exaggerated, flatulent, hot air, inflated, over-the-top, pretentious, puffery, and windbagery.

In Sutcliffe’s case the language of concern is his use of the phrase “tremendous priority”, which is contradicted to the nth degree by each of the ten events.

Further, each of those contradictions is compounded by his non-response to survey #1 and survey # 2 which asked him, “Do you agree citizens are entitled to free, easy, timely, and direct online access to City of Ottawa public records?”.

Based on the ten events that occurred after Sutcliffe made his pronouncement about restoring and improving transparency, accountability, and trust, compounded by his non-response to the question in survey #1 and survey #2, it appears to say that Sutcliffe’s pronouncement is along the lines of “much ado about nothing”, and has do-nothing implications for citizens seeking improved access to city records during this term of council.

Councillor Marty Carr, 0/2

Carr’s committee and board memberships include Audit, Community Services, Environment and Climate Change, Transit, Community Housing Corporation, Police Services Board, and Public Health.

All those assignments involve public records of interest to citizens, several of which such as Police Services Board and Transit have been criticized for years for their ongoing communications failures, and their perceived cone of silence attitudes that treat people as nuisances.

Due to committee and board assignments Carr is affected by all 10 events, and each event begs the question as to why she does not agree that citizens are entitled to free, easy, timely, and direct online access to City of Ottawa public records in order to effectively assess her performance and that of council.

Summary finding. From a practices perspective, Carr is deep down in the negative implications bracket when it comes to ensuring that citizens have free, easy, timely and direct online access to city records.

Councillor Steve Desroches, 0/2

Desroches previously served on council with Jim Watson as mayor.

His current committee and board assignments include Community Services, Emergency Preparedness and Protective Services, Transportation, and Light Rail.

All those assignments involve public records of interest to citizens, and the Light Rail Transit file is one which has been criticized for years for its ongoing communications failures, and the perceived cone of silence attitude of that committee which treats people as nuisances.

To his credit Desroches responded to the second survey.

However, his response is problematic, and could point to a lack of understanding that afflicts a number of members of council, with emphasis on members of the Finance and Corporate Services Committee whose mandate includes item 11, Communications and Organizational Development:

Oversee and make recommendations to Council on the City's communications goals, strategies and methods for providing timely and accurate information to residents.

The two pertinent emails follow. First, the email to Councillor Desroches.

From: wellar.barry@gmail.com <wellar.barry@gmail.com>

Sent: Monday, March 11, 2024, 5:08 PM

To: 'Steve Desroches' <Steve.Desroches@ottawa.ca>

Subject: Ottawa Council, 2022-2026, Public access to public records, transparency and accountability survey 2.

Councillor Desroches

My records do not show a response to the email of February 23, 2024, regarding the survey #2 question,

Do you agree that citizens are entitled to free, easy, timely, and direct online access to the public records held by the City of Ottawa?

If it is correct that you have not responded, then this is a reminder that I look forward to receiving your response by the noted due date on March 15, 2024, so that I may proceed to the report write-up as scheduled.

And, if you have already responded, then please re-send your response so that it may be recorded correctly.

Thank you.

Dr. Barry Wellar, C.M.
Professor Emeritus, University of Ottawa
President, Information Research Board, (IRB) Inc.
133 Ridgfield Crescent
Nepean, ON K2H 6T4
<https://wellar.ca/informationresearch/>

And second, the reply from Desroches.

From: Desroches, Steve <STEVE.DESROCHES@OTTAWA.CA>

Sent: Monday, March 11, 2024 5:21 PM

To: wellar.barry@gmail.com

Cc: Peori, Patrick <patrick.peori@ottawa.ca>; Kell, Joshua <joshua.kell@ottawa.ca>; Mayo, Christiane <christianeameliejulienne.mayo@ottawa.ca>; White, David <David.White@ottawa.ca>

Subject: RE: Ottawa Council, 2022-2026, Public access to public records, transparency and accountability survey 2.

Further to your email, I support the current policies and process to access information from the City of Ottawa. More information can be found at:

[Access to information | City of Ottawa](#)

Sincerely,

Councillor Steve Desroches

The problematic aspect of his response is that the survey question asks specifically about “records”, and not about “information”.

Tremendous concerns therefore arise as to whether Desroches knows the differences between records and information, and whether other members of council know the differences.

In the immediate term, however, for the purposes of survey #1 and survey #2 Desroches did not respond “Yes” to the question, Do you agree citizens are entitled to free, easy, timely, and direct online access to City of Ottawa public records? Hence, his response score is 0/2.

Due to committee assignments Desroches is affected by all 10 events, and each event begs the question as to why he does not agree that citizens are entitled to free, easy, timely, and direct online access to City of Ottawa public records in order to effectively assess his performance and that of council.

Summary finding. From a practices perspective, and bearing in mind that Desroches has been on the cone of silence wagon before as a member of a Watson council, he is deep down in the negative implications bracket when it comes to ensuring that citizens have free, easy, timely and direct online access to city records.

Councillor David Hill, 0/2

Hill’s committee memberships include Audit, Community Services, Emergency Preparedness and Protective Services, Environment and Climate Change, and Transit.

All those assignments involve public records of interest to citizens, with increasing interest in records dealing with Emergency Preparedness and Protective Services and Environment and Climate Change.

As for Transit, that committee has been criticized for years for its ongoing communications failures, and its perceived cone of silence attitude that treats people as nuisances.

And now, interest in Transit-related records has been ramped even higher due to work-from-home issues involving federal government employees, which increases citizen interest in free, easy, timely, and direct online access to transit-related records.

However, rather than respond to the surveys and have his position on public access to public records aired in the public domain by means of a Chronicling project production, Hill sent me an email asking about a meeting.

That email is reproduced here, as is the response, because they provide an opportunity to expand on the reason for referring to the concepts of transparency and accountability as buzzwords or as drivers ensuring the standard of access to public records in Canada is best practice. **(10)**

From: Hill, David <david.hill@ottawa.ca>

Sent: Thursday, August 31, 2023 8:45 AM

To: wellar.barry@gmail.com

Subject: RE: Transparency, communication top new city manager's agenda, Ottawa Citizen, August 24, 2023.

Barry-

I have read a number of your emails on several topics and I appreciate your thought, forthrightness and persistence. Would you be interested to have a coffee/lunch with me at some point this fall? Best to you

David

By the date of that transmission, Councillor Hill would have been included as a recipient of several dozen emails to council as a whole and to Mayor Mark Sutcliffe, including emails involving the 10 events.

Moreover, those emails contained references to several dozen reports on the project, [*Chronicling the Use of Transparency and Accountability as Political Buzzwords, and as Drivers Ensuring the Standard of Access to Public Records in Canada is Best Practice.*](#)

In case it is not self-evident, it is explicitly noted that like many other researchers. I use emails because they are a means of a “paper trail” to establish transparency and accountability on my part.

And, in case it is not self-evident, emails and other elements of a “paper trail” elicited from or created by politicians can be used to examine their claims about transparency and accountability.

Unrecorded verbal communications of the one-on-one variety, on the other hand, have severe limitations from a research perspective including the “he said-she said” weakness, and are not used in any of my research productions.

It therefore strikes me as tremendously untoward that anyone who is a subject of surveys that I am conducting, has read my emails, and appreciates my “thought, forthrightness and persistence”, would think about seeking to host a private, no-paper-trail coffee/lunch meeting.

Further, given the subject of the email, Transparency, communication top new city manager's agenda, Ottawa Citizen, August 24, 2023, in my opinion it would be improper at best, with code of conduct implications for both of us, to pursue that topic in a private meeting which fails both transparency and accountability standards. **(11)**

The response email conveys the Information Research Board principle to uphold and be seen to be upholding the highest research standards related to transparency, accountability, and objectivity.

From: wellar.barry@gmail.com <wellar.barry@gmail.com>

Sent: Friday, September 8, 2023, 4:57 PM

To: 'Hill, David' <david.hill@ottawa.ca>

Subject: RE: Transparency, communication top new city manager's agenda, Ottawa Citizen, August 24, 2023.

Councillor Hill,

Thanks, very kind of you to extend such an invitation. However, due to IRB protocols I must decline.

Sincerely,

Barry Wellar
Dr. Barry Wellar, C.M.

Professor Emeritus, University of Ottawa
President, Information Research Board,(IRB) Inc.
133 Ridgefield Crescent
Nepean, ON K2H 6T4
<https://wellar.ca/informationresearch/>

Further, and this may come as a surprise to Hill and other members of council who request or attend private meetings for which no paper trail exists, as a professional planner, geographic information system professional, recognized expert witness for civil trials and hearings in Ontario and Saskatchewan, and a Member, Order of Canada, with awards that cover a lifetime of professional engagement, it is reasonable to suggest that the standards of transparency and accountability to which I am held far exceed those of municipal politicians who may be here one term and gone the next. **(12)**

It is therefore tremendously disconcerting that a member of Ottawa council would put so little prudent thought into a meeting request, in part because it occurs that he may be in the habit of issuing such invitations which, for all intents and purposes are off the record, that is, there are no records made of such meetings.

Due to committee assignments and councillor responsibilities, Hill is affected by all 10 events, and each event begs the question as to why he does not agree that citizens are entitled to free, easy, timely, and direct online access to City of Ottawa public records in order to effectively assess his performance and that of council.

Summary finding. From a practices perspective, Hill is deep, deep down in the negative implications bracket when it comes to ensuring that citizens have free, easy, timely and direct online access to city records.

Councillor Clarke Kelly, 0/2

Kelly’s committee memberships include Agriculture and Rural Affairs, Built Heritage, Emergency Preparedness and Protective Services, and Planning and Housing.

All those assignments involve public records of interest to citizens, with increasing concern about the conflictual relationship between Agriculture and Rural Affairs and Planning and Housing, with emphasis on where and when and why development – housing, roads, institutional, commercial, industrial, recreational, etc., – is to occur and is not to occur inside and outside the urban boundary,

Due to committee assignments Kelly is affected by all 10 events, and each event begs the question as to why he does not agree that citizens are entitled to free, easy, timely,

and direct online access to City of Ottawa public records in order to effectively assess his performance and that of council.

Of particular concern, however, is his role in the playing out of

Event 8. News item about improper lobbying by staff for a dirt dump: How does that action square with restoring and increasing trust, transparency, and accountability, and applying the code of conduct or other professional standards to affected staff?

and

Event 10. Does rezoning a chunk of the Central Experimental Farm (CEF) pass the smell test for trust, transparency, and accountability at Ottawa city hall? Or, to re-phrase, if developers are not complaining, then should taxpayers be alarmed about a sweet deal for the CEF 2.0 development proponents?

Both those matters fall within Kelly’s domains of interest, you might say, and it is more than reasonable to expect that he would be out front ensuring that residents in both the rural area and the urban area would have free, easy, timely, and direct online access to all records pertaining to event 8 and event 10, including his comments on the matters raised in the discussions about event 8 and event 10.

Based on searches for extant productions, Kelly missed a rare opportunity to promote an informed dialogue about the significance of the highest and best use principle to both rural and urban land uses.

That being the case, it appears fair to say that when a councillor misses an opportunity that obvious and that profound, there is cause for tremendous concern about his grasp of the importance of citizens’ proper access to public records in order to influence the informed functioning of a municipal government.

Summary finding. From a practices perspective, Kelly is deep down in the negative implications bracket when it comes to ensuring that citizens have free, easy, timely and direct online access to city records.

Councillor Wilson Lo, 0/2

Lo’s committee memberships include Audit, Community Services, Environment and Climate Change, Planning and Housing, Transportation, and Transit.

All those assignments involve public records of interest to citizens, with increasing interest in records dealing with environment and climate change, planning and housing, transportation, and transit, with a focal point of that interest being their interdependence.

That interdependence has been known for at least 100 years and is the essence of a primary planning principle which holds that the integration of transportation planning and land use planning (residential, commercial, industrial, institutional, recreational, green space, etc.) is a core feature of sound urban development.

As a member of Environment and Climate Change, Planning and Housing, Transportation, and Transit Committees, Lo is uniquely placed to ensure that citizens are fully apprised about City of Ottawa dialogue regarding infrastructure interdependence, as well as integrated transportation planning and land use planning.

However, I have not ascertained that Lo has done any work of that kind, nor that he has asked or instructed staff to perform such work.

That being the case, what we have before us in Councillor Lo is a tremendously wasted opportunity to enlist the expertise and experience of many thousands of Ottawa residents who know far more than any member of council about the particulars in their neighbourhoods and beyond of infrastructure interdependencies, and transportation and land use integration or failure thereof.

As for Transit, that committee has been criticized for years for its ongoing communications failures, and its perceived cone of silence attitude that treats people as nuisances.

And now, interest in transportation-related and transit-related records has been ramped even higher due to work-from-home issues involving federal government employees, which adds to citizen interest in free, easy, timely, and direct online access to those records.

Due to committee assignments and councillor responsibilities, Lo is affected by all 10 events, and each event begs the question as to why he does not agree that citizens are entitled to free, easy, timely, and direct online access to City of Ottawa public records in order to effectively assess his performance and that of council.

Summary finding. From a practices perspective, Lo is deep, deep down in the negative implications bracket when it comes to ensuring that citizens have free, easy, timely and direct online access to city records.

Or, to re-phrase, from the perspective of someone who has been involved in municipal politics for more than 50 years, community activism for more than 50 years, professional planning for more than 35 years, and geographic information systems for more than 50 years, the apparent failure of Councillor Lo to ensure citizens have free, easy, timely, and direct online access to records on infrastructure interdependencies and

transportation planning and land use planning integration has the direst of implications for citizens. **(13)**

Councillor Stéphanie Plante, 0/2

Plante’s committee and board memberships include Built Heritage, Community Services, Emergency Preparedness and Protective Services, and Community Housing Corporation.

Due to committee and board assignments, Plante is affected by all 10 events, and each event begs the question as to why survey #1 and survey #2 did not yield the response that citizens are entitled to free, easy, timely, and direct online access to City of Ottawa public records in order to effectively assess her performance and that of council.

Summary finding. From a practices perspective, Plante is down in the negative implications bracket when it comes to ensuring that citizens have free, easy, timely and direct online access to city records.

F. Implications of the “New Gang” of Non-Respondent Councillors Ignoring Calls to Improve Trust, Transparency, Accountability, and Public Access to Public Records

On the negative side of the practices bar, a critical remaining question is whether the new gang falls into the bad, worse, or worst category.

A selection of words and phrases to describe a 0/5 record for each member of the old gang and 0/35 overall for the gang as a group was developed for interim report 27, [Interim Report 27. Implications of the “Old Gang” of Non-Respondent Councillors Ignoring Calls to Improve Trust, Transparency, Accountability, and Public Access to Public Records.](#)

Feedback on Table 1 in interim report 27 indicates that since this is a first approximation for a pilot study, and results of 0/2 for each member of the new gang and an overall result of 0/14 which are consistent with the results for the old gang, it is reasonable to use the same terms and phrases for both gangs. Further, no apparent reason came up to change terms or phrases for the new gang, so Table 1 is repeated.

As noted in interim report 27 regarding the old gang, and now the new gang in interim report 28, the terms and phrases describe my perception and the perceptions of several “guest contributors” regarding the behaviours of members of council who did not respond to a survey question which asked during back-to-back terms of council, “Do you agree that citizens are entitled to free, east, timely, and direct online access to public records?”

Further, they also demonstrate the sense that, based on the non-effect of the 10 major events, prospects are limited for changes of mind by any new gang members.

Or, as one review session agreed, if even one of those events is not enough to get a Yes response to the survey question, then the implication for citizens is that the cone of silence of last term is still in place, and access to records is a bottom priority of these council members.

Table 1. Terms and Phrases to Describe Politicians Who Do Not Show Due Regard for Citizens’ Access to Public Records

anti-accountable	inflexible
anti-accountability	insincere
anti-democracy	intolerant
anti-democratic	locked-in
anti-openness	mind-blocked
anti-transparency	misguided
anti-transparent	narrow-minded
arbitrary	obsequious
arrogant	obstinate
autocratic	pigheaded
bossy	pompous
bumptious	poseur
closed-minded	presumptuous
conceited	pretentious
control freak	rigid
despotic	self-indulgent
dictatorial	self-important
dogmatic	self-serving
elitist	sheep
entrenched	submissive
hypocrite	sycophant
ideologically inflexible	toady
ideologue	uninformed

Moreover, the impression is created that they seem to want to prevent transparency and accountability.

The bottom line, then, is that had the non-respondents participated in the surveys, it might not have occurred to use the ten events as an evaluation tool. However, the ten

events proved to be a very effective means to critique both the old gang in interim report 27 and the new gang in interim report 28.

The general finding which is gorgeously supported by the evidence provided by the ten events, therefore, is that the implication for citizens is dire, that is, the prospects are very limited that any members of the new gang of non-respondent councillors are likely to heed calls to improve transparency, accountability, trust, and public access to public records.

Or, to re-phrase from the perspective of worst, worse, bad, good, better, and best practices, the lack of effect of the ten critical events on their second survey responses affirms that the proposition of providing citizens free, easy, timely, and direct online access to City of Ottawa records is consigned to the bottom of the practices barrel by new gang council members Sutcliffe, Carr, Desroches, Hill, Kelly, Lo, and Plante.

G. Conclusion

The ten events selected to critically examine the results of the surveys in terms of their implications for citizens' access to City of Ottawa public records performed as anticipated for a pilot study.

That is, reviews of the literature about examining the likely intentions of non-respondents to the surveys suggested an outside-the-box evaluation test.

Discussions with other researchers, and reviews of hundreds of communications with city officials led to choosing an events test to investigate the bases of decisions to not respond to a question that is directly connected to promises made during election campaigns and is tied directly to the official terms of reference for job descriptions defining the duties of members of a municipal council.

Because all the events are fully documented there is no doubt about their authenticity, and because all the pertinent documentation was made available to all members of city council, there are no legitimate grounds to plead ignorance.

The critical finding is that based on their records to date, and the disregard shown to the events, it is most likely to the point of a foregone conclusion that none of the seven members of council – Sutcliffe, Carr, Desroches, Hill, Kelly, Lo, and Plante – is likely to agree that citizens are entitled to free, easy, timely, and direct online access to City of Ottawa public records.

Further, it is most likely to the point of a foregone conclusion that use of the terms transparency and accountability by each of these members of council – Sutcliffe, Carr, Desroches, Hill, Kelly, Lo, and Plante – will be as political buzzwords rather than drivers ensuring the standard of access to public records in the City of Ottawa is best practice.

The bottom-line implication for Ottawa citizens, therefore, is that council members Sutcliffe, Carr, Desroches, Hill, Kelly, Lo, and Plante are part of the access to records problem, and have no apparent contribution to make to solving that problem.

I. Endnotes

1. Apparently no orders came down from a higher governmental authority (e.g., Government of Canada, Government of Ontario) or legal authority instructing Ottawa council members to limit public access to City of Ottawa records, or to not respond to survey inquiries. It seems fair to say that it was a matter of free choice to not respond.
2. There are millions of substantive productions on this topic, including many, many thousands of publications by the Urban and Regional Information Systems Association (URISA), a leading organization in research on the topic of “records” which include text, image, and other productions created by reality > data > information > knowledge transform processes.
3. Curry, a 2022-2026 non-respondent on two occasions, replaced J. Sudds during the 2018-2022 term. Sudds was a three-time non-respondent. [Interim Report 16. Third Survey Asking City of Ottawa Mayor and Councillors, Do you agree that citizens are entitled to free, easy, timely, and direct online access to the public records held by the City of Ottawa?](#) Because Curry replaced Sudds during the term, Sudds’ files became Curry’s files, and it appears fair to say that they shared the same view about not responding to a survey asking *Do you agree that citizens are entitled to free, easy, timely, and direct online access to public records?*
4. The term “world-class” rarely amounts to more than puffery when used by politicians, but it is their term, and they can expect to be held to associated standards. In this case the terms “world-class” and “best practice” are taken at face value to mean superlative, as in top of class and top of practice.
5. In the absence of explanations about what Sutcliffe meant by the terms used in the story, there is wide room for interpretation about the message he hoped to convey and the objective he hoped to achieve. By way of brief illustration, was his statement about restoring and increasing trust, transparency, and accountability being a matter of tremendous priority for him a message to council to get on board? Or was it just loose talk during an interview-op? Or, could it be, that he was attempting to disarm citizens into thinking that the cone of silence is done and gone so look away, nothing to see here?
6. As a follow-on to endnote (3), the essence of transparency and accountability goes far beyond their use as buzzwords by politicians. In brief, and this should be spelled out as part of item 11, citizens need to know how transparency and accountability are being

measured in an operational sense so that they can evaluate claims made by politicians. That said, the word “tremendous”, as in “tremendous priority”, seems to be putting transparency and accountability in the best practices class when it comes to action, which makes it incumbent upon Mayor Sutcliffe to lead by example and to bring councillors along with him.

7. Members of the old gang – Curry, Darouze, Dudas, Hubley, and Tierney with the exception of Leiper from time to time – seemed to agree with whatever Mayor Watson wanted. As a result, it does not appear to be a stretch to deduce that they would be inclined to take their leads from Mayor Sutcliffe, who is frequently referred to in social media as “Watson 2.0.”

8. About 80% of City of Ottawa records have what are termed locational, spatial, or geographic attributes, and are supported by geographic information systems (GIS) hardware, software, and firmware.

The GIS field has a history of more than 60 years, and the Region of Ottawa-Carleton/City of Ottawa became engaged in the burgeoning GIS field in the early 1970s. The dirt dump event involves paper and digital maps, and GIS, and prompts questions about the ethical conduct of politicians and staff members involved with any aspect of producing or using GIS products and processes in association with lobbying on behalf of the dirt dump development approval.

9. Including the term “data-driven” is consistent with its popular usage by some Ottawa municipal politicians. However, based on the seeming absence of public records using methods or techniques of quantitative analysis or synthesis to drive data use, it appears fair to say that the term is primarily used by Ottawa’s municipal politicians as a buzzword.

Should I be in error, then I welcome receiving links to records describing the use by Ottawa’s municipal politicians of such quantitative methods and techniques as comparative analysis, cost-benefit analysis, cost-effectiveness analysis, cross-impact analysis, econometric analysis, forecasting, highest and best use analysis, impact assessment, indicators, indexing, life-cycle analysis, modelling, normative Delphi, optimization, sensitivity analysis, spatial analysis, and statistical analysis.

These and more data-driven quantitative methods and techniques can be found in https://escholarship.org/content/qt9kb4921k/qt9kb4921k_noSplash_4ef23019fd4c270a7538a34beec1c017.pdf?t=krnjs1, so a considerable number of ways exist to put the data-driven concept to work. In the names of transparency and accountability, it is high time for data-driven decision-making to be put on display, with links to records so that citizens can validate claims.

10. As per the previous 32 reports in the Chronicling series, the concepts of transparency and accountability are referred to as drivers when they are used in practice to move the state of access to public records up the ladder from worst to worse to bad to good to better and, ultimately, to best.

Transparency and accountability are referred to as buzzwords when they do not serve any purpose except to create the false impression of action to improve the content of those records, and the quality of citizens' access to public records.

The key, common term on both cases is records, and with more than 10 reports making the driver-buzzword distinction and connection, it is tremendously concerning that I would be asked to attend a recordless meeting that could only be at the buzzwords level at best.

11. City politicians and staff have codes of conduct which in my experience are weakly enforced at best, and end when they leave office or positions unless, for example, civil or criminal charges are filed. As a researcher I have been attending to professional, competency, ethical, moral, and other standards for more than 50 years, and I find it tremendously concerning that even a newcomer to council would not grasp that reality.

12. Hill is far from the first municipal politician to request a private meeting, which pretty much means that it is off-the-record, but that in itself may not be a problem. Where the request for such a meeting becomes a tremendous problem is when it comes while the municipal politician is one of the subjects in a research project about transparency and accountability, and who did not respond to two surveys asking, Do you agree citizens are entitled to free, easy, timely, and direct online access to City of Ottawa public records?

13. There may be records of City of Ottawa productions on interdependent infrastructures, and integration of transportation planning and land use planning, including some of my own materials. However, I use the conditional language to acknowledge that literature searches proved futile, including document searches associating those keyword phrases with members of the new gang, that is, Sutcliffe, Carr, Desroches, Hill, Kelly, Lo, and Plante. Should productions of those natures exist, I welcome them being brought to my attention.

Acknowledgements

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I also acknowledge the text formatting and technical assistance of **Sam Herold**, a University of Ottawa alumnus and one my former students (Geography, Environmental Studies, and Geomatics) who made valuable contributions to this report.