



Media Advisory

Accountability? Transparency? On our terms only...

Newmarket, ON, January 9, 2018 – As part of the continued commitment to transparency, accountability, and fiscal responsibility, volunteers from the Newmarket Taxpayers Advocacy Group Inc. (NTAG) regularly review financial reports provided by the Town of Newmarket in preparation for budget discussions. In October/November 2017 after a thorough review of Town expenses, NTAG asked for additional clarification on some expenses that did not provide a description, or reason, for the expense (such as, \$1,100 in restaurant meals at the Museum).

Seven (7) emails were sent to various Town of Newmarket departments requesting explanation on select expenses. Requests were directed to senior management of these departments – Directors and Managers whom have authorized the expenses. Central York Fire Services and the Newmarket Library responded within 24 hours, and provided fulsome and helpful explanations. Parks and Recreation, Information Technology, Museum, Public Works, and Engineering departments did not respond.

On several occasions NTAG was assured answers would be at hand. The Legislative Services department, a Commissioner, and the Mayor, all confirmed that our queries would be addressed soon. The Mayor wrote *“Thank you for your email. Your request involves a considerable amount of research and a response will be forthcoming in the near future.”* – November 10, 2017.

After several weeks with no explanations, NTAG emailed the elected officials for assistance. Several emails were sent to all members of Town of Newmarket Council asking for their assistance in providing NTAG with clarification on certain expenses – expenses made with taxpayer money. One Councillor responded to our emails stating *“Tony wants to run with this.”* No Councillor responded to our legitimate request for clarification on publically funded Town of Newmarket expenses.

Two days prior to the budget vote NTAG received an email from Mayor Van Bynen. Van Bynen states staff will no longer answer our queries. He states: *“...to allow staff to focus their time on service to the community, all of your routine requests and inquires will be collected and information will be made available for the entire community through community open houses.”* Two days later, Council approved the 2018 budget. NTAG endeavoured to receive clarification for over six weeks. To date, no other elected official has responded to requests for assistance.



“It is scandalous and deplorable that duly elected officials, in an election year, do not feel they have any obligation to provide answers to taxpayers related to the use of publically funded expenses,” states Teena Bogner, President of NTAG. “At what point did taxpayers consent to this lack of transparency or accountability with our money? At what point did Councillors feel they bear no responsibility or explanation to Newmarket citizens? When did Newmarket become governed by elected officials, who unilaterally decide whether to provide information on our tax dollars, and then only on their terms? It is truly shocking.”

NTAG continues the pursuit of information through formal Freedom of Information requests (and subsequent appeals to the Information and Privacy Commissioner, as necessary). NTAG has currently consulted with the Ontario Ombudsman, whom has been investigating the situation.

Newmarket Taxpayers Advocacy Group Inc. (NTAG) is a provincially incorporated non-for-profit ratepayers group in Newmarket, ON. NTAG is a non-political, non-partisan, advocacy organization dedicated to fair taxes, less waste, and transparent and accountable government in all levels of government (town, region and school boards) in Newmarket, Ontario, Canada.

For information on Newmarket Taxpayers Advocacy Group Inc.:

Teena Bogner

President

president@ntag.ca