

# The wrong guy, in the right place at the wrong time

*Chris Cooke - September 2022*

Chris Carter needs a reality check.

Sarnia's chief administrative officer who maneuvered a \$50,000 pay hike in the midst of the pandemic appears enamored with consultants.

He spent \$1.2 million on them in the last year.

They came from Montreal, Toronto and Ottawa with glitzy proposals for the waterfront, expansion of the urban boundary and a glorious \$19.2 million upgrade for Sarnia's Chris Hadfield Airport.

These so-called experts, endorsed by Sarnia's \$233,000 chief administrative officer rolled out colourful photography and detailed maps.

They included an elaborate \$55 million waterfront masterplan that architects suggest "when realized will tell the city's story" of its founding, linked to agriculture and the petrochemical industry.

All quite lovely, of course.

Paul Hicks is the Montreal consultant behind the expensive plan which includes a skating loop, lookout tower, lighting on the grain elevators, a floating boardwalk and an assortment of other niceties is all quite lovely, of course.

And endorsed of course by Mr. Carter and his minions at Sarnia City Hall who had it quickly rubber stamped by our outgoing city council.

The same city council that gave him a \$50,000 raise in the midst of the pandemic.

Which appears to be Mr. Carter's problem.

He is very good at getting what he wants at the expense of what everyone else wants.

Everyone else being taxpayers.

You see Mr. Carter and most of his minions rolled in from Niagara where he was formerly employed until he wasn't.

One of the realities of Mr. Carter's short tenure here is a lack of history and therefore a lack of understanding.

Reality, if you will.

While glitzy consulting proposals are showy and colourful and supposedly the mark of a progressive community they do nothing for taxpayers swimming in sewage in south end Sarnia.

And the reason is there is nothing glitzy about sewage bobbing in basements and taxpayers with their worldly possessions on their front lawns.

But Mr. Carter and his minions don't know that because they aren't from here.

Let me suggest if they were they may have had a more sensible approach to the \$1.2 million spent on consultants.

I've learned through the years that there is nothing glamorous about sewage, especially when it is flushed and it doesn't go away.

I'm reasonably confident that the residents in Coronation and Sherwood Village couldn't give a damn about Mr. Carter, his glitzy waterfront proposals and consultancy reports.

When crap happens, it happens and the general objective is to have it go away.

And if we have learned anything about last month's floods it is this.

That their overpaid chief administrative officer in the corner office at Sarnia City Hall has screwed up priorities, needs a reality check and isn't their guy.

I could be wrong about this but I'm not.

## The road to victory is strewn with losers

That didn't last long.

Michelle Alton is leaving Sarnia after just five months at Sarnia City Hall.

The ink was barely dry on her name plate as City Solicitor and now she is out of here.

For the folks in south Sarnia floating in sewage from basement flooding she was about as popular as a skunk at a garden party.

Alton had a million “legal” reasons why the city couldn’t help and her response at an emergency meeting last month only angered already distraught residents who were threatening to withhold taxes.

She was also unpopular with Margaret Bird regarding the financials at Sarnia Airport. Unhappy with the \$400,000 being doled out to Scottsdale Aviation, Bird demanded, but didn’t receive details about how the money was being spent.

She was told by Alton that Scottsdale is a private corporation and details of how public money is being spent are “confidential”.

The response landed badly and Bird expressed her displeasure.

In a press statement, newly arrived Steve Henschel thanked Alton for her short time but not necessarily good time at Sarnia City Hall.

Henschel, a former reporter in the Niagara Region called offering his services as the new communications manager to set me up with bureaucrats I may want to interview.

I’m sure he means well but in the nearly 55 years I have been covering municipal politics in Sarnia I’ve never really needed assistance navigating city hall.

Which brings me to Steve Loxton.

I have been told not to look at his site. He has been described as “the critic of everything, the author of nothing”.

Loxton wanted to know if I’m endorsing anyone this election year.

The short answer is no but the longer answer is there are candidates that need to be shown the door and I don’t mind assisting with that discussion.

Mike Stark comes to mind.

He likes money, wants money and I suspect needs money since that has been his primary objective since warming a council seat four years ago.

Apparently, no one told him that municipal politics is an honorarium not a pay cheque.

It pays \$23,000 at the city level, \$23,000 at the County level and Stark believes it should pay at least \$14,000 more.

He describes Sarnia as being “at the low end of the pay scale” and for obvious reasons.

It is an honorarium not a pay cheque.

Stark also wants to close the airport and believes municipal politicians should have access to baby-sitting services while attending council meetings.

If Mr. Loxton is wondering I wouldn’t vote for this guy.

I also wouldn’t vote for Brian White who in my estimation should have been blown out at the last election.

His only occupation appears to be municipal politician and he is the author of the “babysit my kid, please” motion.

I suggest if he can’t find a babysitter don’t make the taxpayer do it.

And then there is Anne Marie Gillis, the head of the Purple Gang that she steered during her failed mayoralty bid last time.

She and White endorsed then integrity commissioner Robert Swayze’s attempted to oust Mike Bradley.

When that failed Gillis ran against him.

And now she is back hoping we are suffering from amnesia.

I could be wrong about this but I’m not.

## The right Mr. Cooke gets his heart fixed

“Mr. Cooke what is your date of birth?”

I didn’t realize it but I would be asked that question at least two dozen times during my six hour stay in emergency at Sarnia’s Bluewater Health.

I suffer from two heart conditions that singularly are bad enough but combined need attention.

They are cardio myopathy, an enlargement of the left ventricle of the heart and atrial fibrillation an abnormal heart rhythm that eventually causes the heart to flutter.

Over a few decades, with the assistance of medication I have been able to live a relatively normal semi active life.

But periodically when I’m least expecting it things that function normally don’t and I have to have what in the medical profession is called a cardioversion.

It is a rather interesting procedure where electric pads are used to shock my aging heart

back to a more normal rhythm also called sinus rhythm.

Which brings me to “Mr. Cooke what is your date of birth?”

In late August while traveling in Michigan and later in Kentucky on business I noticed a slight flutter which caused my Apple watch to explode with information.

When I returned home I decided to push through because my Rotary Club was presenting Paul Harris Awards and I was a sponsor and I had this publication to complete and an assortment of business issues small business owners deal with on a daily basis.

By late week it became clear I couldn't push through any longer.

Which brings me to “Mr. Cooke what is your date of birth?”

There I was on a late Friday in the emergency department at Bluewater Health. My family doctor Michael Stoesser had arranged for me to meet the head emergency room doctor Chris Bork.

He is surrounded by a bullpen full of secretaries, nurses, specialists and high-tech computers and technology.

Oh, and there is security.

Police come. Police go.

Paramedics in bright yellow gear come and go.

Phones ring constantly.

There is a drug problem in Sarnia and one only has to hang out in the emergency room at Bluewater Health to have a first-hand look.

But through all the chaos everyone is calm. It was like watching a television medical drama only live and in living colour.

The calmness was surreal until Dr. Bork asked me my birthdate and I went to sleep while he fixed my heart.

I now know why Sarnia's Bluewater Health is among the top hospitals in Southwestern Ontario.

Through chaos the professionals are professional and they know the right question.

“Mr. Cooke what is your date of birth?”