

Recommendations and reactions to the Ombudsman's investigation report about the Regional Municipality of Niagara's 2017 council meeting, upcoming outreach events and more in the July newsletter.

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OMBUDSMAN REPORT PROMPTS APOLOGY FROM NIAGARA REGION TO JOURNALIST AND CITIZEN BLOGGER

Acting on Ombudsman Paul Dubé's recommendation, the chair of the Regional Municipality of Niagara publicly apologized to a journalist and a citizen blogger on July 26 for seizing their property and removing them from the building during a council meeting in December 2017. The Ombudsman called for the apology in his investigative report, [Press Pause](#), on July 18. He found that the region's reaction to the discovery of a recording device during a closed session of the meeting was unreasonable, wrong and contrary to law. Regional chair Alan Caslin apologized "wholeheartedly and unreservedly" to the individuals at the July 26 meeting.

In the report, Ombudsman Dubé makes 14 recommendations to better ensure that fairness, accountability and proper consideration of the law guide the council's actions in future. "These improvements would avoid arbitrary decision-making, and render the expulsion process more accountable, transparent, and fair," he writes.

Building on some changes that the region has already made since last December, the Ombudsman's recommendations include clarifying the definition of "improper conduct" in the region's procedural by-law and



trespass policy, and also clarifying what circumstances might warrant seizure of property or expulsion from a meeting. In addition, the Ombudsman has recommended the region develop procedures to ensure the public access doors are not locked during meetings, and that it make audio or video recordings of all closed meetings.

Regional officials co-operated with the investigation, which was launched on December 14, 2017 following 11 complaints to our Office. The council met in late July to consider the Ombudsman's report and have directed staff to report back on next steps to address the recommendations.

[Read the full report here](#)



GLOBE EDITORIAL: PUBLIC OFFICIALS LIKE THE OMBUDSMAN 'REMINDEVERYONE OF THE TRUTH'

The Globe and Mail's [editorial](#), published shortly after the release of [Press Pause](#), backed the Ombudsman's recommendation that Niagara's regional council make formal and

personal apologies to the reporter and blogger who were removed from the meeting on December 7, 2017. As the Globe's editorial says, "journalists perform an essential civic function," and the Ombudsman's investigation helps remind the public of it.

PRESS PAUSE: MORE NEWS

- [Caslin apologizes for illegal seizure](#)
- St. Catharines Standard
- [Ombudsman says Niagara Region's seizure of reporter's laptop was 'unjust, and wrong'](#) - CBC News
- [Press Pause: One-on-One with Paul Dubé](#) - St. Catharines Standard



NEW MUNICIPAL MEETING INVESTIGATION REPORTS

[Read the results of our latest investigations into closed council meetings.](#) This month, the Ombudsman found the [Village of Casselman](#) did not violate the closed meeting rules during a meeting and informal discussion earlier this year, but made five best-practice recommendations to improve procedures. And while an investigation into the [Township of Front of Yonge](#) found no evidence that an illegally closed meeting occurred in April, the Ombudsman made suggestions to improve the township's record keeping.



HERE, THERE AND EVERYWHERE

This month, superintendents-in-training had a chance to ask us all about how the Ombudsman works with school boards during a presentation to the [Supervisory Officer's Qualification Program](#) meeting in Toronto. [Browse our school board case](#)

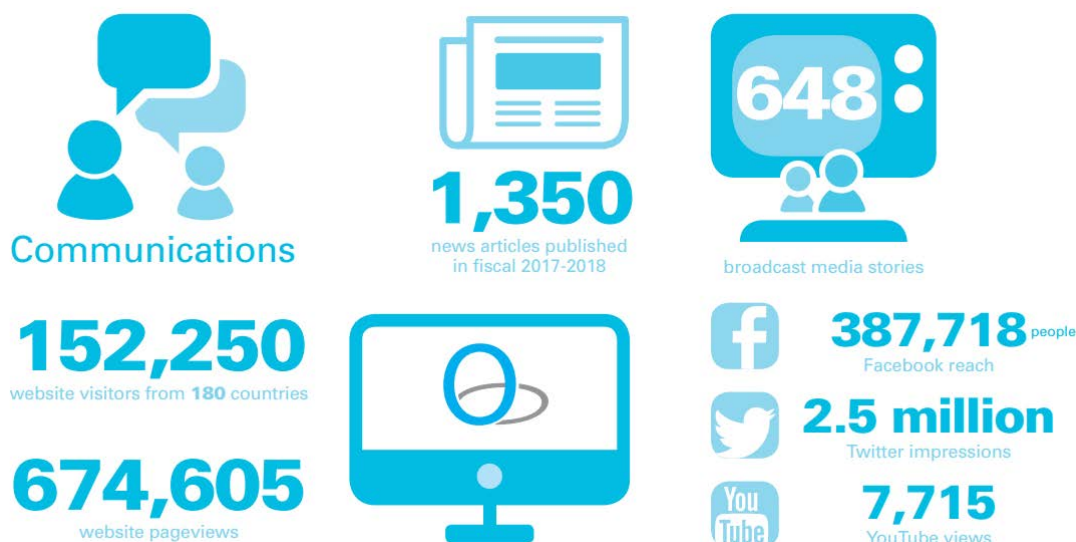
[resolutions](#) to see our work in practice.

Keep an eye out for us next month in Ottawa at the [Association of Municipalities of Ontario annual conference](#) on August 19-20. Stop by our booth to say hello and get the latest resources for municipal staff and councillors!

Find our new tip cards for councillors and municipal staff here

REACHING OUT

We love to share our expertise! Last year our Office participated in 62 outreach events and our staff visited close to two dozen different Ontario communities. We also hosted training and consultation sessions with representatives from five Canadian provinces and eight different countries. Are you keen to learn from us, too? [Browse our video resources](#) for helpful videos on topics like how to develop an effective municipal-level complaint policy, or how our Office works with university ombudsman offices in Ontario. [Or read more about this in our 2017-2018 annual report!](#)



DID YOU KNOW?

The term "ombudsman" originated in Sweden, and means "citizen's representative." The term is actually gender neutral - in fact, [Roberta Jamieson served as Ontario's first female Ombudsman](#) from 1989 until 1999. You might spot variations on the word "ombudsman" among other oversight offices, such as the Office of the Ombudsperson in British Columbia, or the University Ombuds at McMaster University in Hamilton. The word "ombudsman" is also used in French. For example, Gatineau's municipal oversight office is

called Bureau de l'Ombudsman de la Ville de Gatineau. [Meet current Ontario Ombudsman Paul Dubé here.](#)

CASE SUMMARY

When a woman hit a pothole that damaged her vehicle, she tried to seek reimbursement for the repair. The county told her it was the Ministry of Transportation's jurisdiction, but the Ministry told her the opposite. After our staff contacted both levels of government, Ministry officials determined it was indeed in their jurisdiction, and the woman was compensated the more than \$1,100 it cost to repair her vehicle. [Read more successful complaint resolutions here.](#)

[File a complaint online or contact us here](#)

The Ombudsman is an independent officer of the Ontario legislature who conducts oversight of provincial government agencies and municipalities, universities and school boards. Ombudsman Paul Dubé began his five-year term on April 1, 2016.

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