



Committed to Listening

National Capital Commission Ombudsman

Annual Report 2010

What is an ombudsman?

The word *ombudsman* is of Swedish origin. In Sweden, the role was established to create an avenue for addressing individual complaints made against public agencies.

An ombudsman is an independent, objective officer who deals with complaints against government agencies or other organizations, in the public or private sector. A complaint is addressed to an ombudsman if a government agency or organization has been unwilling or unable to resolve the complaint to the satisfaction of the public or the individual complainant.

An ombudsman receives complaints through formalized and standardized intake processes. The ombudsman must first assess whether or not a complaint falls under the office's jurisdiction and if it has merit. An ombudsman must work independently and impartially, meaning that the ombudsman holds no interest in the outcome of a dispute, other than to leave the parties involved feeling that the process was transparent, neutral, accessible, easy to understand and fair. Resolution is most often achieved by establishing trust and communication, coupled with the ombudsman's judgment about what are fair and reasonable actions between the parties.

An ombudsman has the discretion to act informally, and will advise the parties involved about the receipt of a complaint. Most often, the reason for the complaint is not due to agency fault, and the dispute is resolved through discussion.

When appropriate, the ombudsman will make non-binding recommendations about how to resolve a dispute. The decision to implement any recommendations rests entirely with those appointed to manage the agency.

The ombudsman is not an advocate for the complainant or for the NCC.

Mandate

The ombudsman, within the limitations of the mandate, provides members of the public with an independent, confidential, neutral, fair and equitable mechanism for resolving complaints relating to the activities of the National Capital Commission (NCC), when avenues internal to the NCC have been exhausted.

Mission

The mission of the ombudsman is to listen carefully and with an open mind to concerns and complaints raised by members of the public. When deemed appropriate, the ombudsman will intervene or investigate, on a confidential basis, with a view to resolving complaints. The complaints are considered fairly and with impartiality.

October 30, 2010

National Capital Commission Board of Directors

Dear Members of the Board,

I am pleased to submit the *National Capital Commission Ombudsman Annual Report 2010*. This second annual report explains the mandate of the ombudsman and how the mandate is discharged, and summarizes the activities of the office of the NCC Ombudsman during its second year of operations, from November 1, 2009, to October 30, 2010.

In the coming year, further work lies ahead to fully consolidate the office of the NCC Ombudsman. I look forward to serving in 2011, and remain committed to providing quality services to those who may call upon my office.



Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Laura Bruneau".

Laura Bruneau
NCC Ombudsman

“I would like to thank you for your rapid response... . Your clarification and advice are very appreciated.”

How to contact the NCC Ombudsman confidentially

TELEPHONE

613-947-4330
1-877-947-4330 (toll-free)
613-947-4339 (TTY)
1-877-947-4339 (toll-free TTY)

FAX

613-947-4311

MAIL

NCC Ombudsman
311-40 Elgin Street
Ottawa ON K1P 1C7

EMAIL

info@ombudsman.ncc-ccn.ca

www.ombudsman.ncc-ccn.ca

The Year in Review

Ombudsman services were first introduced in April 2009 for members of the public seeking independent recourse to resolve their complaints relating to NCC activities. The first annual report summarized the strategic objectives achieved to establish an operational framework, launch the office, and build awareness and understanding in the public domain through the use of plain language and an easy-to-follow complaint process. This second annual report speaks further to the ombudsman's role in dispute resolution.

The annual budget for the office is approved by the NCC board of directors and administered by the NCC's corporate secretariat. Throughout the past 12-month period, the office of the NCC Ombudsman employed one full-time person. The Ombudsman, a part-time independent contractor, worked roughly one day a week. All operations and services are handled by the office of the NCC Ombudsman, except for corporate services, which include financial management, human resources, information technology and access to information. The first point of contact is with the office's private and secure telephone answer service, at which time the office deals with all questions, inquiries and complaints.

In addition to responding to contacts from the public, this second year saw much time devoted to establishing appropriate and productive relationships within the NCC. An increased understanding of the ombudsman role within the NCC was sought and achieved. Procedures, policies and processes were communicated to NCC staff. The relationship between the ombudsman office and the NCC has become increasingly productive, and has progressed to regular discussions at senior levels. Topics of discussion have included defining the arm's-length relationship and the type of interactions that lead to a productive response to complaints. An open house for all NCC staff, as well as special presentations to NCC executives, served to highlight and confirm the collective dedication to promoting dispute resolution.

The office of the NCC Ombudsman continues to mature, and to make progress toward realizing its full potential. The Ombudsman looks forward to assisting further with strengthening trust and collaboration between the NCC and the community.

“... I should take this opportunity to say that you have been an enormous help... . We value your thorough and intelligent handling of the complaint.”

Strategic Goals Achieved in Year Two

Service access

Complaint processing

Sound analysis of issues

Data capture and sorting

Resolution of complaints

Updating of the website

Public reporting

*Continuous improvement
of knowledge and skills*

Education

*Refining practices,
policies and procedures*

*Adherence to terms
of reference, ethical
standards, policies,
procedures and values*

Core Services

When a complaint is received, action is taken based on what is deemed appropriate to the circumstances of each individual. At the outset, the ombudsman confirms that the complainant has discussed the complaint with the NCC directly and, if unresolved within NCC internal redress, the ombudsman proceeds with intake processes.

By way of direct contact, the ombudsman offers problem solving through coaching, informal intervention that embraces identification, internal consultation, collaboration and effective resolution of disputes. Pursuing this type of service is intended to assist in the longer term with building healthy, balanced relationships between the NCC and citizens.

It is important to ensure that complaints are addressed in a comprehensive, impartial and independent manner. Timely completion of complaint reviews is an objective, as is developing mutual and inclusive relationships to achieve better understanding and respect among all parties. The use of technology greatly enhanced workplace efficiency and document management.

Numbers at a Glance

In the past 12 months, there were 50 contacts with the NCC Ombudsman. Some were simple inquiries, but most were contacts that required action, as described below.

CLASSIFICATION	NO. OF CONTACTS	PRACTICAL RESULT
Level 1	23	Referred to external department or entity due to a mistaken belief that NCC was involved.
Level 2	21	Referred to NCC Contact Centre after it was found that internal redress avenues were not called upon or not fully exhausted.
Level 3	6	Ombudsman file opened for examination or intervention.

The NCC Ombudsman represents a second level of dispute resolution. In responding to contacts to date, the Ombudsman has encouraged complainants and coached them, when appropriate, to resolve their concerns directly with NCC staff members or through the NCC's Contact Centre.

There is no statistical evidence within the NCC known to the Ombudsman, and only the limited experience described above, on which to base the performance of the NCC Ombudsman office, to date. Furthermore, it is not practical to include a case study. Volume, subject matter and degrees of complexity remain impossible to report or project at this time.

Complaint Types

Noise

Trails / Bike paths

Health and safety issues

Ski trails

Property maintenance

Universal access

Moore Farm

Contact Method

Email 43%

Telephone 43%

Letter / Fax 12%

In person 2%

Complaint Handling

The complaint resolution process encourages the NCC to resolve complaints without redress to the ombudsman. Complaints must first be raised with the NCC's Contact Centre. Only when the NCC itself has rendered a decision or responded to a complaint may the complainant choose to appeal to the ombudsman. The ombudsman works informally and independently of the NCC administration to assess the merits of a complaint and resolve disputes.

Level 3

