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June 25, 2026

Office of the Ombudsman of Ontario
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Re: Request for Investigation - Open Meeting / Closed Meeting Access Complaint - City of Niagara Falls Council Meeting, June 23, 2026

Dear Ombudsman of Ontario,

I am requesting an investigation into whether the City of Niagara Falls complied with the open meeting requirements of the Municipal Act, 2001, its procedure by-law, and the City's open meeting obligations during the City Council meeting held on Tuesday, June 23, 2026.

My complaint is that, during an active public Council meeting, the front doors of City Hall were locked, the lobby/reception area was unattended, and I was effectively prevented from re-entering City Hall to attend the public portion of the Council meeting in person. In my view, this created a de facto closed meeting, because members of the public could be physically prevented from entering the building and observing a meeting that was required to be open to the public.

This complaint is separate from any issue relating to my delegation. I was scheduled to delegate at the June 23, 2026 Council meeting, but the delegation itself and the deferral of that matter are not the focus of this complaint. The focus of this complaint is public access to an open Council meeting.

I also note that this incident occurred during the 2026 municipal election period. I am a registered candidate for City Councillor in Niagara Falls. I am not raising that point to request special treatment. I am raising it because open Council meetings during an election period have heightened democratic importance. The issue affects ordinary residents, members of the public, candidates, media, and anyone who wants to observe or participate in municipal decision-making. A locked public entrance during an active public meeting can discourage or prevent public participation at precisely the time when transparency is especially important.

Background and timeline

On Tuesday, June 23, 2026, I attended Niagara Falls City Hall to observe the public Council meeting. I arrived at approximately 7:30 p.m., around the time the first planning matters were being discussed.

When I approached the front doors of City Hall, the doors were locked. I looked into the lobby/reception area and did not see anyone present. I knocked or banged on the door. After approximately 20 seconds, a security officer appeared from the area near or beyond the Clerk's Department, off to the right-hand side of the lobby area, and came to open the door.

I introduced myself and indicated that I was there to watch City Council. I then proceeded toward the stairs to go to Council Chambers on the second floor. As I was doing so, the security officer said, in what

I perceived to be a condescending tone, "You're a little late for the meeting," and told me that I had to sign in.

It was not my intention to sign in before attending a public Council meeting, as I have not previously understood that to be required for members of the public attending Council meetings. However, because of the tone and manner of the security officer, I felt that I was practically obligated to sign in or risk creating a verbal conflict or being prevented from attending the meeting.

I then attended the Council meeting. The matter relating to my delegation was deferred. I then left Council Chambers and proceeded to leave City Hall.

At approximately 9:00 p.m., as I entered the first-floor lobby/reception area to leave, there was again no one present. I said words to the effect of, "Hello, is there anybody there? Security?" I looked toward the window area and toward the Clerk's Department area. Nobody was visible or present.

At that time, it appeared that the lobby and any areas not physically secured were unattended. In my opinion, this also raised a serious security concern, because the public entrance area appeared to be unattended while the Council meeting was still ongoing.

I then left the building.

Immediately after leaving, I changed my mind and decided that I wanted to return to Council Chambers to observe the remainder of the public meeting in person. I went back to the front doors of City Hall and attempted to re-enter. The doors were locked. I waited for a reasonable amount of time. No one was present in the lobby. Because I had just checked the lobby and reception area before leaving, I knew there was no staff or security person present in the lobby/reception area to let me back into the building.

As a result, I was effectively locked out of City Hall while a public Council meeting was still underway. I then went home.

Why this raises an open meeting concern

The public has a right to attend and observe open meetings of municipal Council, except where the Municipal Act permits a meeting or part of a meeting to be closed to the public.

In this case, my concern is not that Council passed a formal closed-session resolution at that time. My concern is that the City's building access and security procedures resulted in the public portion of the meeting being practically closed to members of the public who attempted to attend or re-enter in person.

If I was locked out after leaving briefly, then the same situation could have affected any other member of the public who arrived at City Hall during the meeting. A member of the public could have walked up to the locked front doors, found no one present to admit them, and simply walked away. I am not claiming to know that this happened to another person, but the circumstances created that possibility. The public should not have to know a special procedure, locate hidden staff, bang on the door, or rely on a chance encounter with a security officer in order to attend an open Council meeting.

This is also important because viewing a Council meeting in person is not the same as watching a limited camera view online. While I was waiting outside Council Chambers that evening, I had an unusual but relevant conversation with another observer. She specifically explained that one of the reasons she attends Council meetings in person, rather than simply watching them on YouTube, is that the camera view does not capture the full atmosphere of the room. It does not show all of the body language, reactions, movements, expressions, and interactions of Council members and others in Chambers. I found that observation significant because it reinforces that the public has a real and legitimate interest in physically attending open meetings, not merely having access to a narrow video recording or livestream. Public access to Council Chambers allows residents to observe the full context of how municipal decisions are discussed and made.

In my view, an open meeting must be open in a practical and functional sense. If City Hall is advertised or understood as the location of the public Council meeting, then there must be a reliable way for the public to enter the building and access Council Chambers while the public portion of the meeting is underway.

This is especially important during an election period. Residents may want to observe how Council members conduct business before voting. Candidates may want to observe Council proceedings to better understand issues, decisions, and public concerns. Media may wish to attend and report on the meeting. A locked or unattended public entrance can interfere with all of those democratic functions.

The City's public materials indicate that Council meetings are open to the public in person in Council Chambers. In those circumstances, locked doors and an unattended entrance during an active meeting undermine public access and transparency.

Prior similar incidents

This is not the first time I have personally experienced this issue.

This is the third documented time that I have been locked out of City Hall while attempting to attend or continue attending a public municipal meeting.

On one prior occasion, I left a Downtown Advisory Committee meeting to use the washroom and was locked out when I attempted to return.

On another prior occasion, I attempted to attend another Downtown meeting at City Hall and was again locked out at the front door.

I made prior complaints about those incidents. The City is therefore aware, or ought to be aware, that this is a recurring problem. Despite those prior complaints, the issue appears to have continued and again affected access to the June 23, 2026 Council meeting.

For that reason, I do not believe it is sufficient to treat this as an isolated misunderstanding or a matter that should simply be discussed informally with City staff again. The City has already had notice of the problem, and it has continued.

Security concern

There is also a related security concern. When I left Council Chambers and arrived in the lobby around 9:00 p.m., the front reception/lobby area appeared to be unattended. No security officer or staff person was visible. At the same time, the public entrance doors were locked from the outside, meaning the building was not reliably accessible to the public, while the interior lobby area appeared unattended.

This raises two concerns at the same time:

- Members of the public could be locked out of an open Council meeting; and
- Areas of City Hall that were not physically secured appeared to be left without visible staff or security presence.

I understand the City has renovated City Hall and has referenced improved security or sign-in features. However, if those systems result in public meeting attendees being locked out, while the lobby is also left unattended, then both public access and security are being undermined.

Authorities and public records relied upon

I rely on the Municipal Act, 2001 open meeting requirements, including sections 239, 239.1, and 239.2, and the principle that municipal Council meetings must be open to the public unless a statutory exception applies.

I also rely on the Ontario Ombudsman's open meetings guidance, which states that a person may request an investigation into whether a municipality complied with section 239 of the Municipal Act or complied with its procedure by-law in respect of a meeting or part of a meeting that was closed to the public.

I also rely on the Ombudsman's July 2021 report concerning the City of Niagara Falls, which found that Council contravened the Act when it passed a resolution in a portion of a meeting that was effectively closed to the public because the public was unable to attend in person or observe a live broadcast. The same report urged the City of Niagara Falls to ensure the public's right to observe municipal meetings is upheld in full and recommended that Council ensure the public is able to observe all open portions of meetings held by Council and its committees.

I further rely on the City's own public records confirming that the June 23, 2026 Council meeting had a public agenda starting at 4:00 p.m., and on the City's 2026 Municipal Election page confirming that the nomination and registration period began on May 1, 2026, that the campaign period begins on May 1, 2026 or when a candidate files nomination papers, whichever is later, and that I am listed as a City Councillor candidate.

Requested investigation

I request that the Ombudsman investigate whether the City of Niagara Falls complied with the Municipal Act, 2001, its procedure by-law, and open meeting obligations in relation to the June 23, 2026 Council meeting.

In particular, I request that the investigation consider:

- Whether the public entrance to City Hall was locked during the public portion of the June 23, 2026 Council meeting;
- Whether members of the public had a reliable way to enter City Hall and access Council Chambers while the public meeting was ongoing;
- Whether a sign-in requirement was imposed on members of the public attending an open Council meeting, and if so, whether that requirement was authorized, publicly communicated, and consistent with open meeting principles;
- Whether the City had adequate staff or security present at the public entrance to ensure public access during the meeting;
- Whether the circumstances created a de facto closed meeting or otherwise prevented the public from attending the open portion of the meeting in person;
- Whether this incident reflects a recurring failure, given my prior documented complaints about being locked out of City Hall while attempting to attend municipal meetings;
- Whether the City has adequate policies, procedures, signage, staffing, and security instructions to ensure that open Council and committee meetings remain genuinely open to the public for the duration of the meeting; and
- Whether, during an election period, the City's public access arrangements are sufficient to protect the ability of residents, candidates, media, and other members of the public to observe and participate in municipal democratic processes.

Requested evidence to review

I respectfully request that the Ombudsman obtain and review any relevant evidence, including:

- City Hall security camera footage from the front entrance, lobby, reception area, Clerk's Department entrance area, stairwell area, and Council Chambers access points for the relevant time period on June 23, 2026;
- Door access logs, lock/unlock records, alarm records, or electronic security system records for the front doors of City Hall on June 23, 2026;

- Security officer shift records, incident notes, sign-in sheets, instructions, post orders, or reports for that evening;
- Any City policy requiring members of the public to sign in before attending a public Council meeting;
- Any Council, Clerk's Department, or security policy dealing with public access to City Hall during evening Council or committee meetings;
- Any prior complaint records relating to members of the public being locked out of City Hall during Council, committee, or advisory committee meetings;
- The video recording, agenda, and minutes of the June 23, 2026 Council meeting, to confirm that the public meeting remained underway at the time I was locked out; and
- Any election-period procedures or communications dealing with equal and reliable access for residents, candidates, third-party advertisers, media, and the general public attending Council or committee meetings.

Requested outcome

I request that the Ombudsman find that the City must maintain practical and reliable public access to City Hall and Council Chambers during the full duration of all open Council, committee, and local board meetings held in City Hall.

I also request that the Ombudsman recommend that the City of Niagara Falls adopt or revise procedures to ensure that:

- The public entrance to City Hall remains accessible during all open public meetings, or that a clearly marked and reliable access procedure is provided;
- A staff member or security officer is visibly stationed or immediately available at the public entrance during all evening public meetings;
- Clear signage is posted at the public entrance explaining how members of the public can enter while a meeting is underway;
- Members of the public are not improperly discouraged, delayed, or prevented from attending open Council meetings;
- If sign-in is required for security reasons, the City clearly identifies the authority, purpose, and limits of that requirement, and ensures it does not operate as a barrier to attending an open meeting;
- Security staff receive written instructions that public attendance at Council meetings is a legal right and that access must be facilitated, not discouraged;
- Council and the Clerk report publicly on what steps will be taken to prevent this from happening again; and
- During the 2026 municipal election period, the City confirms that residents, candidates, media, and the general public will have reliable, equal, and practical access to open Council and committee meetings.

This complaint is made because I was personally locked out of City Hall while attempting to attend the public portion of a Council meeting, and because this appears to be a recurring access problem that the City has already been made aware of.

Respectfully submitted,

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Source and authority references

- Municipal Act, 2001, S.O. 2001, c. 25, sections 239, 239.1 and 239.2:
<https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/01m25>
- Ontario Ombudsman, Open Meetings - Guide for Municipalities:
<https://www.ombudsman.on.ca/en/info-public-bodies-and-officials/municipal-government/open-meetings-guide-municipalities>
- Ontario Ombudsman, Investigation into a meeting held by the City of Niagara Falls on October 6, 2020, Final Report, July 2021:
<https://www.ombudsman.on.ca/sites/default/files/Media/ombudsman/ombudsman/resources/Municipal-Meetings/Ontario-Ombudsman-City-of-Niagara-Falls-Final-July-2021-EN-accessible.pdf>
- City of Niagara Falls, Council Meeting Schedule - June 23, 2026 Council meeting:
<https://webpublic.niagarafalls.ca/CityCouncil>
- City of Niagara Falls, 2026 Municipal Election page - candidate listing and key election dates:
<https://niagarafalls.ca/city-government/elections/2026-municipal-election/>
- City of Niagara Falls, Contact Us - Clerk contact information and City Hall address:
<https://niagarafalls.ca/city-government/contact-us/>