



Ombudsman



# Annual Report 2013

National Capital Commission Ombudsman

# 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 complainant.

The ombudsman must 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. Where possible, 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.

December 31, 2013

*National Capital Commission Board of Directors*

Dear Members of the Board,

I am pleased to submit the *National Capital Commission Ombudsman Annual Report 2013*. This fifth annual report explains the mandate of the Ombudsman and how the mandate is discharged, in addition to summarizing the activities of the office of the NCC Ombudsman during its fifth year of operations. Ombudsman services were delivered throughout 2013 with the objective of giving members of the public a chance to be heard and helping the NCC ensure that disputes are addressed in a fair manner.



Yours truly,

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ellen Fry'.

Ellen Fry  
NCC Ombudsman

“Thank you so much for your prompt response. I wouldn’t have made much progress in solving this problem without your excellent suggestion.”

### 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](mailto:info@ombudsman.ncc-ccn.ca)

[www.ombudsman.ncc-ccn.ca](http://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. During the first year of operations, strategic objectives were set and achieved to establish an operational framework and launch the office, as well as build awareness and understanding in the public domain, through the use of plain language and an easy-to-follow complaint process. The second year of operations was directed at initiating the ombudsman's role in dispute resolution.

The third year saw much time devoted to further establishing appropriate and productive relationships within the NCC. The objective was to achieve a thorough and detailed understanding of the ombudsman role within the NCC. This resulted in changes to the terms of reference, internal reporting and administrative processes.

In its fourth and fifth years of operations, the office of the NCC Ombudsman continued to grow and mature. In June 2012, Ellen Fry became the new NCC Ombudsman, bringing to the office her considerable experience in ombudsman work, dispute resolution and government operations.

In 2013 the Ombudsman, a part-time independent contractor, worked approximately one day a week. The office of the NCC Ombudsman also employed one full-time administrative person. The annual budget for the office is approved by the NCC board of directors. All operations and services are handled directly by the office of the NCC Ombudsman, except for general corporate services.

“Thank you so much for your reply.... I appreciate your help....”

Below are two examples of complaints where the Ombudsman intervened.

**1** An individual who was injured on NCC recreational property complained that NCC processes and communications to deal with this situation were inadequate. The NCC agreed, and is taking action to address this.

**2** An individual complained about a number of issues concerning the grooming of cross-country ski trails in Gatineau Park and the NCC's associated website. The individual also suggested that the NCC post signs to warn skiers about snowmobile tracks in extraordinary situations, such as the cleanup after a major storm, when these are unavoidable. As a result of this complaint, the NCC has increased its monitoring of the grooming issues that were raised, improved the accuracy of its website and agreed to post signs as suggested.

## Core Services

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

The Ombudsman's goal is to resolve complaints in a fair way, using the simplest, least adversarial process possible. The Ombudsman uses the approach that best suits the circumstances of each individual complaint.

If a complaint cannot be resolved through agreement between the complainant and the NCC or other informal processes, the Ombudsman writes a report recommending the action the NCC should take concerning the complaint. Both the complainant and the NCC receive copies of the Ombudsman's report.

## Complaint Types

Operation of NCC policies and procedures

Lease service issues

NCC property maintenance

Other issues about NCC operations and service

## Numbers at a Glance

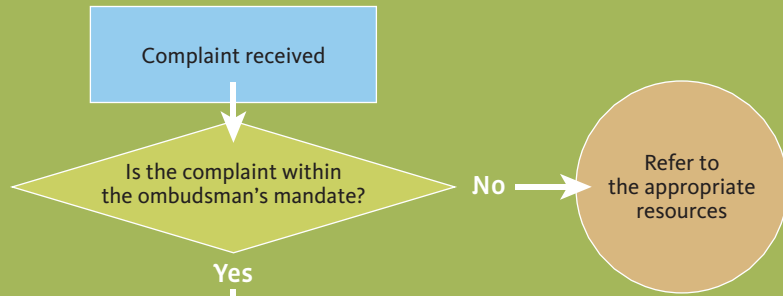
In 2013, there were 89 issues and inquiries from the public.

TYPE OF ISSUE/INQUIRY	NO. OF ISSUES/INQUIRIES	ACTION
Issue for Ombudsman investigation	13	Investigated the complaint and recommended resolution
Inquiry about the Ombudsman's role	4	Explained the Ombudsman's role
Issue within the NCC mandate, but NCC internal resolution has not yet been tried	56	Referred to NCC Client Services
Issue outside the NCC mandate	16	Referred to a more appropriate organization

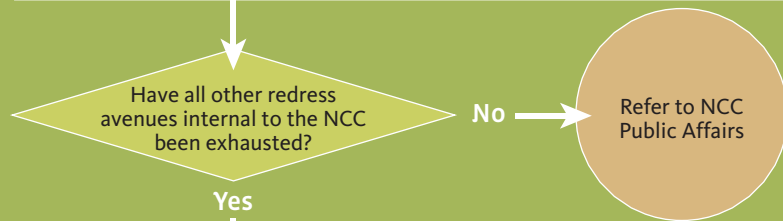
# Complaint Handling

The complaint resolution process encourages the NCC to resolve complaints without redress to the Ombudsman. Complaints must first be raised with the NCC internally. Only after this 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 1



## Level 2



## Level 3

