



Greenspace Alliance of Canada's Capital
Alliance pour les espaces verts
dans la capitale du Canada

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Annual Report 2008 November 2007 - November 2008

The Greenspace Alliance of Canada's Capital is the leading advocate of greenspace preservation and expansion in the National Capital region. This year we undertook a number of activities to help preserve significant greenspace in the capital and provided input on sustainable farming, development and transportation.

Members of the Board in 2008 were: Cheryl Doran (Chair), Carol Gudz (Vice-Chair), Theresa Jobateh (Secretary), Amy Kempster (Treasurer), Janice Seline (Membership), Chris Szpak (co-Secretary), Barry George (Communications), Joseph Potvin, Bill Royds, George Wilson and Sol Shuster.

Main Activities

Leitrim: Judicial Review and Permits To Take Water

The Greenspace Alliance, as part of the "Friends of Leitrim" -- a group working to prevent the destruction of the Provincially Significant Wetland -- worked tirelessly on preparation for a Judicial Review of the June 2007 decision by the Ontario Municipal Board to dismiss our zoning appeals, on alerting the Ministry of the Environment to possibly illegal water taking practices throughout the fall and winter months and on commenting on proposals for Permits To Take Water (PTTW). In this they were ably assisted by the pro bono services of the legal team of the Ecojustice Environmental Law Clinic at uOttawa. Unfortunately, based on a technicality, we lost on our Judicial Review application. We appealed one PTTW to the Environmental Review Tribunal and successfully fought off motions to dismiss that appeal and allegations that we had trespassed. However, that Permit expired before the substance of our Leave to Appeal could be adjudicated. A 10-year Permit is now proposed and we have supplied extensive comments, supported by reports from Drs. Fred Michel and G. Clarke Topp.

As a fall-out from the Judicial Review application, the City of Ottawa has filed with the Divisional Court a request for \$5,120 together with the Findlay Creek Developers who are seeking costs of \$67,217 from the Greenspace Alliance. We are currently awaiting the Divisional Court's decision and will contemplate our next move pending advice from the Ecojustice Environmental Law Clinic.

As much as these costs claims have caused us great grief, it is only a drop in the bucket as our lawyers are also being sued by the same Findlay Creek developers for \$3,000,000, alleging defamation.

Carp River floodplain

Members of the Alliance were active in the "Carp River Coalition" which was formed to fight against the filling and developing of the Carp River floodplain and for adequate restoration of the Carp River. After a lengthy wait for a ministerial reply to our Part II Order Request (related to the environmental assessments for the Kanata West development), the Minister of the Environment, the Honourable John Gerretsen, responded by placing stringent conditions on the City and the developers.

Following a report by its Auditor General, the City also has agreed to undertake an independent review of the engineering work underlying the environmental assessments and policy decisions, and the Alliance was involved in reviewing the Terms of Reference for this review.

Protection of Species At Risk

The destruction of federal wetlands through the Greenbelt and Transport Canada lands south of the airport are under threat once again by the North-South LRT alignment. Last December we met with Environment Canada and the Minister's office to inform the Minister of the Species At Risk that exist in urban Ottawa and the wonderful opportunities that this discovery could bring to the nation's Capital. We are continuing to work with the Federal departments to ensure SAR and federal wetlands are protected.

Alliance members took our issues to the Provincial Government in March when we met with The Honourable Donna Cansfield, Minister of Natural Resources in Toronto. Our work with MNR to recognize significant wetlands and Species At Risk is ongoing.

Poet's Hill and Poets' Pathway

The Poets' Pathway Committee is very busy organizing for new members and it is also applying for a grant from the City of Ottawa. This should assist in implementing the Poets' Pathway website. A successful concert and poetry-reading evening took place in June of 2008.

Ottawa-Gatineau Sport-Ecology Park

The Greenspace Alliance has cultivated a vision for combined non-motorized water sports (eg whitewater canoe/kayak) with ecological rehabilitation in all the channels around the Eddy Dam as well as Brewer's Creek, involving the municipalities of Ottawa and Gatineau, and the NCC. The NCC has incorporated this vision into high level directions related to the National Capital Core Sector Plan, and in Gatineau both the city's planning and its recreation departments have brought the Sport-Ecology Park idea into their plans. The councillors for each of the related municipal wards in Ottawa and Gatineau have repeatedly expressed support. Municipal staff in Ottawa has held off specific commitments however, until its overdue sewage control retrofitting project is completed.

Chelsea Agro-residential Development

When a developer purchased 110 acres of cattle farmland on the south side of Chelsea, Quebec, the Alliance offered a suggestion that the plan be for agro-residential development incorporating two commercial organic vegetable farms, and housing/yard features that would make small-scale residential food cultivation easy. Can the result be increased agricultural productivity, ecological protection and better return on investment, all at the same time? The developer, Sean McAdam, thought this was a good idea, and his initial proposal to the municipality includes a new 30 acre family farm on one end, a new 15-acre cooperative farm on the other end, and a farmer's market in the commercial area. Most residential units are grouped instead of spread out. Recently he created the "*Common Ground Advisory Committee*", and invited the Alliance to participate along with a local organic farmer, the regional representative of Canadian Organic Growers, and others. The Alliance is now communicating with other developers to determine if they might find this unconventional model more attractive than the usual suburban sprawl onto farmland. It is convenient that we have a genuine case to point to.

Greenbelt Coalition

Sol Shuster has brought together and chairs a Greenbelt Coalition of Canada's Capital Region. The Coalition consists of 15 environmental groups, including the Alliance, City advisory committees, CREDDO, the Biodiversity Task Force, and the Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre. In preparation for the National Capital Commission's Greenbelt Master Plan review, the group meets approximately once a month at City Hall. This review will conclude in 2011.

The Ottawa Official Plan

Greenspace Alliance members have actively participated in the review process of the City's official plan - a lengthy process that is mandated to take place every five years and should be completed in the spring of 2009. This has included attending sessions of rural strategy working groups, and meeting and providing input to Staff on amendments to be drafted so that issues of concern to the Alliance were being appropriately considered. The main focus of the Alliance has been on policies regarding rural residential development, advocating for measures that limit urban sprawl and protect sensitive areas which include Species At Risk in significant wetlands and woodlands. In practical terms, the Alliance has supported fixing the urban boundary, curtailing country-lot estate subdivisions, preventing the development of land designated Rural Natural Features (RNF), and ensuring that provincially significant wetlands be properly recognized and accounted for in the Official Plan.

Zoning Issues

The Greenspace Alliance attended the November 22, 2007 Agricultural and Rural Affairs Committee meeting to voice its request to have a Rural Natural Features overlay applied to the City of Ottawa zoning maps. Councillor Jellet agreed with the idea and asked city staff to look into the issue. City staff regrettably quickly dismissed the idea. We will search for another opportunity to raise the idea with another committee.

Hunt Club extension project

The Greenspace Alliance submitted a Bump Up Request for a full Environmental Assessment for the Hunt Club extension project to the Ontario Ministry of the Environment in early summer. The Hunt Club Extension project is one which extends Hunt Club road to the 417, continues across the 417 towards the Mer Bleue Bog and turns north to Innes Road. This requires removing a huge section of the Greenbelt, so that a road with an 80 km/h speed limit can run parallel to a High Speed 417 highway. Albert Dugal, Dr. Frederick Schueler, Christine Hanrahan and Ken McRae provided input into our research of the environmental features of the area.

Airport Master Plan

On April 3rd, the Greenspace Alliance presented to the NCC Board of Directors issues surrounding their January 24th decision to agree in principle to approve the Airport Master Plan without having considered certain environmental facts. Alliance members worked tirelessly to raise awareness of the Species At Risk Blanding's Turtles and Monarch Butterfly habitat, the old Bowesville forest, and the significant wetlands which exist on these Transport Canada lands. Our challenge is to show the NCC and the Federal departments the beauty that lies within the Greenbelt and along the gateway into the Nation's capital.

National Capital Commission's Urban Lands Study

Members of the Alliance are contributing to the National Capital Commission's Urban Lands study. The group met in the Spring and enjoyed a well organized guided tour through the National Capital Urban Region. Consultants encouraged us to take note of Canadian Symbols including signage, architecture and landscape, which help to remind us of visions across the country. The group is awaiting its second meeting. The study is expected to span three years.

Quarry operators and the potential destruction of Stony Swamp

Our work to protect the significant Ecosystem of the Greenbelt continued this fall when we learned of a Quarry operator on Moodie Drive who was granted approval from the Ministry of the Environment to pump every day the equivalent of 10.8 Olympic size swimming pools into the significant and sensitive Stony Swamp. We immediately raised our concerns for this approval to the Ministry of the Environment and the National Capital Commission. We met with NCC Executive Vice-President, Jean-François Trépanier and the Greenbelt Division managers of the potential danger to the plants and wildlife. We anxiously await their feedback on which steps the NCC will take to protect one of the capital's most defining natural features.

Development Charges City of Ottawa Advisory Committee

Once again, the Alliance is participating in an Advisory Committee for the quintannual review of the City's development charges. The Committee consists of developers, the Federation of Citizens' Associations and members of the Alliance. Although the Development Charges Act desperately needs improvement, the Alliance is concentrating on efforts to ensure that Developers pay their fair share of Transportation and Transit costs.

Gatineau Park Protection Coalition

The Greenspace Alliance is represented in the Gatineau Park Protection Coalition, along with the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, Sierra Club of Canada, Le Conseil régional de l'environnement et du développement durable de l'Outaouais (CREDDO), and, until recently, the New Woodlands Preservation League. We have jointly promoted the Gatineau Park Master Plan as an excellent blueprint for administering Gatineau Park. Through our meetings with and letters to federal, provincial, municipal and private sector decision makers, and the media, we have pressed home the need for that Master Plan to be effectively implemented to fend off threats to the ecological and territorial integrity of Gatineau Park. The NCC, the agency responsible for the park, has not been sufficiently proactive in identifying and countering specific threats, and in some instances federal, provincial and municipal government officials and organizations have been proactively complicit in eroding the ecological and territorial integrity of the Park. Lobbying senior management appears to have been effective as the NCC has recently developed a strategy for the acquisition of larger tracts of privately owned land and has purchased several developable properties in the park. Also, the NCC now has full authority to purchase private properties in Gatineau Park without requiring Treasury Board approval.

Transportation

Barry George on behalf of the Alliance made a submission to the Joint Meeting of Transportation and Transit Committee on May 21, 2008 wherein transit development was seen as an opportunity to protect green spaces while building a better city. Key points made included: The transit plan should make use of existing rail corridors; the transit route should reach the airport and avoid wetlands; expansion of transit beyond the Greenbelt should be made contingent on controls on future land development; there should be no housing development in the Greenbelt, the Central Experimental Farm or radial green spaces; and the possibility of transit and freight connections with Gatineau should be preserved.

The Alliance kept an eye on the discussions about plans for a new interprovincial bridge (or bridges), noting with concern that studies and projections used to support possible sites did not seem to adequately account for various environmental and economic factors. Also, apparent pre-conceived decisions surrounding a purported transportation solution do not clearly state the problem nor address economic and effective options offered by interested citizens and community groups during public consultations.

Fund Raising and Outreach

Plant Sale and Donations:

Thanks to Albert Dugal and Janice Seline, our main fundraising activity this year -- the "rare and unusual" plant sale at the Central Experimental Farm in May -- was a huge success. We raised \$900 at this event and subsequent community plant sale events. Many individuals provided donations of plants and time to sell these plants for Mother's Day.

Outreach and membership

The Alliance hosted tables at a number of environmental fairs, including the EcoFair, Imagine Ottawa, the Billings Bridge Wildlife Festival and the Glebe Eco-Fair. In addition to the Alliance's paid membership, about 120 persons subscribe to our free moderated mailing list. The list helps citizens across the continent to remain informed on issues within the National Capital region. Ron Rancourt has served throughout as our web master and Erwin Dreessen has been the major content contributor. The web site appears to be well visited and makes it to the first page of a Google search for many of the issues we are involved in.

For their September monthly meeting Alliance Directors met in Chelsea. We enjoyed wonderful fixins' and guest speakers from Juniper Farms in Low, Quebec and developer Sean McAdam in Chelsea, Quebec. The push for the agro-residential development was instigated by Joseph Potvin. As a result, Mr. McAdam's development will include acres of Organic Farming, and a Farmer's market using the old barn. Efforts by Mr. McAdam to keep some historic recognition of the farm are being considered – perhaps even naming the Market in the former owners' name.

This meeting was an excellent opportunity to learn the process that goes into Organic farming, the planting and the huge potential for supporting/purchasing local produce. Alex and Juniper currently feed 76 families and two farmers markets from June to October as a result of farming 3 acres of land in any given season, rotating on 10 acres. Together with Juniper Farms, Alliance members provided the developer free advice on developing a sustainable community.

Media Coverage

Many of our activities generated media coverage, including appearances on Rogers Talk TV, CKCU Radio, CBC Radio, Radio-Canada and articles in The Ottawa Citizen, The Ottawa Sun, Le Droit, Ottawa Xpress, Metro and various community newspapers.