

GREENSPACE ALLIANCE of CANADA's CAPITAL
ALLIANCE POUR LA PROTECTION DES ESPACES VERTS DANS LA CAPITALE NATIONALE
Dedicated to preserving greenspace throughout the national capital area.

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TO: National Capital Commission Board of Directors

SUBJECT: A Poets' Pathway
Submission by the Greenspace Alliance of Canada's Capital

SUMMARY

The Fathers of Confederation envisaged the nation's capital as a centre of literature and the arts. Both the Mouvement littéraire and the Confederation Poets turned that vision into a reality.

It was a sense of place that motivated their enduring literary achievement. The natural environment that inspired these artists should be preserved as a memorial to our Canadian literary heritage.

A Poets' Pathway is proposed spanning from Britannia to Beechwood, along creek valleys, meadows and woods, mostly along existing green corridors. (A concept map is enclosed.)

The proposal fits the mandate of the Commission and is congruent with recommendations from a 1994 NCC-led plan for a network of recreational pathways.

If accepted in principle, development of a business plan, with phased implementation, will follow.

THE GREENSPACE ALLIANCE OF CANADA'S CAPITAL was formed in October 1997 and currently has a membership of 11 organizations and some 30 individuals. Its primary aim is to conserve public and private greenspace. This includes natural and landscaped places deemed significant by a community. We also work to protect waterways and wetlands.

We believe that urban greenness is essential for a community's quality of life. Places of greenness contribute to our personal, social, economic, cultural and spiritual well-being. They also connect us with the natural and cultural history of our region.

The Greenspace Alliance works with citizens and groups to save community and regional greenspace. It sends written comments and makes presentations to all levels of government to protect and preserve greenspace. For example, the Alliance has commented on the National Capital Commission's Core Area Plan and on the proposal to develop Moffatt Farm.

BACKGROUND

The Fathers of Confederation envisaged Ottawa as a literary capital. See, for example, Thomas D'Arcy McGee's famous address of 1867, "The Mental Outfit of the New Dominion." This vision was further expressed by Adams George Archibald (1868), Joseph Howe (1872) and Sir Wilfrid Laurier (1890).

The vision became reality through two literary movements which firmly link Ottawa with literature, and with poetry in particular.

- When the civil service moved to Ottawa from Quebec City in the mid-1860s, many young writers, influenced by Quebec's patriotic "Mouvement littéraire," established themselves at Ottawa. Throughout the nineteenth century, the capital's Francophone authors exemplified the ideals of collective endeavour. They established such influential groups as *Le Cercle des Dix* and the enduring *Institut canadien-français d'Ottawa*, which celebrates its 150th anniversary in 2002.
- Three poets, who later became known as the Confederation Poets, were strongly associated with Ottawa. They are Archibald Lampman, William Wilfred Campbell and Duncan Campbell Scott. All three are buried at Ottawa's Beechwood Cemetery, as are Nicolas Flood Davin, a Member of Parliament and another literary companion, and several other literary figures of national importance.

A SUITABLE COMMEMORATION

A strong sense of place dominates the poetry of both the Mouvement littéraire and the Confederation Poets. Alfred Garneau's *La Rivière*, about the Rideau River, and Archibald Lampman's *Winter Uplands*, among many other works, describe landscapes that can still be seen today in selected, precious spots. A commemoration of poetry in the national capital must build on that sense of place.

THE PROPOSAL

We propose the identification of a continuous pathway from Britannia (not far from where Samuel de Champlain met the Algonquin people), via the valleys of the Pinecrest and Nepean Creeks, and through the McCarthy and Pleasant Park Woods, to Beechwood Cemetery. This 30-km pathway would be realized over a number of years. The pathway would:

- communicate to Canadians an important element of the vision of Ottawa as a literary Canada – a vision that encompasses English and French as well as Aboriginal cultures in Canada;
- fulfill a wish of the Historic Sites and Monuments Board, expressed as far back as 1920, that the Confederation Poets be commemorated;
- in many sections, make use of already existing pathways, many owned by the National Capital Commission; in others, implement several of the recommendations of the NCC-led June 1994 report on an Integrated Network of Recreational Pathways;

- serve as an integrating concept for the Commission's Urban Lands Master Plan;
- connect with the Trans-Canada and Rideau Trail networks, and offer many other entry points attractive to both tourists and local residents;
- complement the federal government's Path of Heroes and the former City of Vanier's Outdoor Gallery; and link together Anglophone and Francophone sections of the new City of Ottawa;
- enhance the image of Ottawa as a Green Capital, and link city with country landscapes.

Over the medium to long term, these lands could be put in the hands of an Ottawa Land Trust and the Commission could realize some proceeds from the transfer of land.

To date, we have received encouragement from the Honourable John Manley and support from the national and local poets community, the Ottawa Field-Naturalists Club and several communities that abut the path. We are in the process of seeking support from:

- other communities as well as businesses that abut the proposed pathway;
- the Rideau River Roundtable;
- the *Institut canadien-français d'Ottawa* and the *English Speaking Union of Canada*;
- Advisory Committees to Ottawa City Council (Environmental, Heritage, Arts, Forests, Parks, Bicycle).

In connection with the development of a new Official Plan for the City of Ottawa we have as an objective to see the Plan include a reference to this Poets' Pathway and to the vehicle of an Ottawa Land Trust.

NEXT STEPS

In order for this project to proceed, the Commission's agreement in principle to seriously consider it is required. Once this is obtained, we are in a position to seek further support from:

- other federal Members of Parliament and provincial and local elected officials;
- Ottawa City Council;
- the Governor General and the Royal Society of Canada.

As well, we would proceed immediately to work with Commission staff on the development of a business plan, including phased implementation.