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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Meaningful public consultation required to improve planning in Ottawa, FCA submits

Ottawa, Apr 26—The City of Ottawa’s Planning Summit today at the CE Centre presents an opportunity to examine the changes required to improve planning in Ottawa, says Federation of Citizens’ Associations (FCA) President Graeme Roderick. “The FCA views this Summit as a first step toward establishing a framework for a much needed detailed discussion and debate about how the City’s planning process can become more inclusive, collaborative and effective”, Roderick says.

Community Associations across the City agree that the current planning process fails residents because it lacks meaningful public consultation. “If Councillor Hume is serious about improving the quality of planning and development in Ottawa, the City needs to do a better job of ensuring residents and their community associations are treated as equal stakeholders in the planning decisions that affect them”, says Jay Baltz of the Hintonburg Community Association, Chair of the FCA’s Planning & Zoning Committee.

Bob Brocklebank from the Glebe Community Association agrees. Mr. Brocklebank heads up the FCA’s Governance Committee. “Actions speak louder than words. It’s time for the City to stop talking about bringing Zoning Bylaws in line with the Official Plan and just do it! The FCA is willing to work closely with the City to make this a reality because the current situation is untenable”, Brocklebank says.

“The City of Ottawa is very diverse. Making good planning decisions requires broad consultation with residents right from the start of every project. Both developers and residents would benefit from a more transparent planning process.”

Because many residents believe it’s the City’s job to ensure the integrity of Ottawa’s communities and the safety of its neighborhoods, the FCA believes citizens should be on equal footing with developers when it comes to planning the future of Ottawa’s neighborhoods. “This can only be achieved if the City works in partnership with its residents and provides community groups equal access to Planning staff and resources”, Baltz says.

“The insertion of the pre-consultation meeting between developers and Planning staff into the planning process is a real concern. It has created an imbalance that allows developers unprecedented access to City planning staff, behind closed doors, before the public is made aware.”

The clandestine nature of these meetings has been reinforced by the City’s refusal to include them in Mayor Watson’s proposed Lobbyist Registry. Even the City acknowledges in its Planning Primer courses that the pre-consultation meeting was added specifically to provide developers with the opportunity to pitch and lobby staff on new concepts and ideas for development projects.

“We don’t believe the pre-consultation meeting between developers and planning staff, or any meetings like it, should take place without public awareness”, Brocklebank says. “Public consultation is required from the very beginning of the planning process in order to ensure all possible points are considered

and the best possible decisions are made.”

The FCA also believes that stricter adherence to the City’s Official Plan will help ensure the true intentions of its policies are carried out at street level. “The Official Plan is a contract between the City and its residents”, says Kanata resident Neil Thomson.

“Residents and community groups are tired of the City hand picking which parts of the Official Plan it wants to follow and which ones it doesn’t. It’s the City’s responsibility to ensure that the Plan is implemented properly. It needs to take steps to ensure meaningful public consultation is embedded into Ottawa’s planning process, starting now.”

The Federation of Citizens’ Associations of Ottawa-Carleton (FCA) is a city wide association and forum for community associations and citizens’ groups in Ottawa. The FCA comprises urban, suburban and rural community associations from across the amalgamated City of Ottawa. Members share information about issues facing their communities and take joint action on city-wide issues.

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