

From: [Erwin Dreessen](#)
To: [GA List](#)
Subject: [GA List] Ecology Ottawa & the Greenspace Alliance: A conversation
Date: Saturday, March 10, 2012 11:14:04 AM

Amy Kempster, Sol Shuster and I met with Graham Saul and Emily Diepenveen of Ecology Ottawa at Colonnade Pizza Thursday afternoon. Our two organizations have much in common yet are very different. We probed our histories and priorities and considered whether there is work we could do together.

What we have in common, apart from concern for environmental issues, is that a large part of our energies have been directed at City Hall -- the Greenspace Alliance since 1997 and Ecology Ottawa since 2005. The GA has tended to study reports, make comments and appear before committees or tribunals, focused on land use issues; Ecology Ottawa has tended to use mass mobilization techniques to make an impression on elected officials for a variety of causes that involve municipal government.

Ecology Ottawa has succeeded spectacularly in attracting a broad following -- 5,000+ subscribers to its newsletter and 400 registered volunteers. The GA has, true to its intent, always worked with various groups or coalitions but has never itself become a large-membership organization.

Ecology Ottawa's priorities for the coming year include:

- * Stopping 400 million litres of untreated sewage from flowing into the Ottawa River every year by securing funding for the Ottawa River Action Plan.
- * Improving public transit and lowering greenhouse gas emissions by putting the getting the \$20 million that was taken out of the OCTranspo bus budget put back into our bus system.
- * Catalyzing showcase green building projects and promoting policies to improve building energy efficiency as part of an overall push to save money and reduce greenhouse gas pollution.
- * Help move the clean energy revolution forward by promoting the uptake of renewable energy through Ontario's groundbreaking feed-in tariff policy along with other promising practices in the clean energy revolution.

Graham's main pitch, however, and it was a persuasive one, was about building a grass-roots network. Having worked his whole career for NGOs, often on international issues, he is more than ever convinced that local strength is the key to achieving change. Ecology Ottawa is launching a new campaigning arm called the Community Network and they are looking for volunteers. The Network will bring together environmental leaders from as many of Ottawa's 100 neighbourhoods as possible. These Community Organizers will work together on city-wide campaigns but they will advance those campaigns at the neighbourhood level. This will include things like facilitating a neighbourhood team of Ecology Ottawa volunteers, engaging other local organizations (including community associations), building lists of supporters in the neighbourhood (through things like petition drives), and making sure that City Councillors are hearing from their constituents.

Ecology Ottawa believes that the only way to lay the groundwork for meaningful change is to identify as many supporters as possible and become increasingly effective at mobilizing them around strategic campaigns. Just as effective political

parties work from the ground up to identify sympathetic voters and then do everything they can to get them to the polls on election day, the environmental movement needs to focus on identifying and engaging the hundreds of thousands of people across the city who care about environmental issues and mobilizing them at key campaign moments.

Ecology Ottawa believes that the best way to begin this long process is to develop a strong grassroots network. They are looking for people that are interested in joining the Ecology Ottawa Community Network and taking leadership in their neighbourhood. They are offering training and support, as well as the opportunity to share experiences and work with other environmental leaders across the city.

The Greenspace Alliance for its part -- the small band of braves who have hung in through two re-incorporations as a defence against (unjust but court-dispensed) cost claims, first on "GACC Inc." and then on "FGA Inc." -- see the final stages of the urban boundary hearings (OMB appeals of OPA 76), the start-up of Official Plan Review 2014, the review of the Provincial Policy Statement, and the National Capital Commission's Greenbelt Master Plan review and its Horizon 67 exercise (the review of the Plan of Canada's Capital) as the major issues in the coming year. Should a new attempt at amending the National Capital Act emerge, then that will inevitably also require much attention. Ditto if the NCC's Urban Lands Master Plan ever gets off the ground. Above all, however, the Greenspace Alliance needs more people on its committees and its board, including representation from the Quebec side of the River. As well, there has to be a more focused effort at membership renewal and attraction of donations.

We concluded on this common ground:

1) Herewith, we ask that anyone who would like to volunteer, or knows someone who may wish to volunteer as Community Organizer in the development of Ecology Ottawa's Community Network, or wants to know more, please contact Graham at graham.saul@ecologyottawa.ca or on his cell at 613-558-3368.

2) Ecology Ottawa and the GA, along with others such as the FCA/CAFES, should take a proactive approach by working together to develop a strategy and implementation plan for the 2014 Official Plan Review in order to stop further urban sprawl.

Erwin

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