

Draft - 22 April 2012

“SPEAKING POINTS” for the Mayor’s PLANNING SUMMIT - April 26

GENERAL

The Summit

- + Why was this summit planned without input from the community?
- + How come the Chair of the Greenbelt Coalition (consisting of 15 environmental organizations in the National Capital area) and the Chair of South March Highlands-Carp River Conservation were excluded from participating?

Governance and City-wide issues

- + Why is the City’s 2003 Public Participation Policy a dead letter? Posting information to a website is not sufficient. A proper communications strategy requires outreach through various mediums including website, email outreach, local papers, partner channels like Community Associations and citizens’ groups.
- + The web site with the list of development applications upcoming in a ward is a great improvement as it usually contains some information on them as well their status. But it could be improved by including the timelines for comment and by including applications to the Committees of Adjustment.
- + Committee agendas and documents for committee discussion – and more importantly, for public discussion and comment, are posted on the city’s website one week before the meeting, if we are lucky. That isn’t time enough for community association comment and approval of a position or for neighbours to get together IF they happen to find out about a proposal. Staff are not allowed to give CAs the document prior to their public release. But the developer knows, in the case of planning committee, as the plans are his or hers. We need more than one week to review documents – at planning or any other committee. We need earlier opportunities for dialogue. Development is not all bad and good design does not have to cost more than bad design. Ditto good planning. Public dialogue is essential but we aren’t really getting it. Public consultations are more like “This is what we are going to do” rather than “These are our thoughts – what do you think – how can we make this development a good contribution to your living space.”
- + Why are Planning staff encouraging developers to request exceptions to the Comprehensive Zoning By-law?
- + The Committees of Adjustment should be given guidelines on what constitutes a "minor" variance. (It’s not defined in the *Planning Act*.)

+ Why does the City allow Planning staff and Council to make minor variance decisions without applying the 4 tests required by the *Planning Act*, when the Committee of Adjustment and OMB have to apply and justify them? (N.B.: Not clear what these 4 tests are. Committees of Adjustment are governed by section 44 of the *Planning Act*.)

+ The Lobbyist Registry data base should NOT exclude discussions of staff or Council members with developers or their consultants!

+ Planning Primer courses are well received, and the recent addition of (new) Parks Planning and Heritage Planning courses are also welcome. When will we see courses on Natural Heritage protection? Archeological Resource protection? Cultural Heritage protection?

+ When will the 1997 Natural Area Reports (still a key reference) and the 2005/2006 Urban Natural Areas reports make it to the City's web site?

+ What is the City doing about the corporate memory loss from amalgamation?
[N.B. Examples?]

+ When will we see the return of genuine discussion at City Council meetings? There is too much "fixed" behind closed doors. Why does the Mayor treat Councillors like so many bobbleheads? [Ref.: Ottawa Sun, April 3. Quote: "Watson is so intent on presenting his council as one which speaks with one voice, he once even went so far as to scold councillors for asking too many questions at council. "]

+ This Council has learned the wrong lesson from the difficulties experienced by the previous Council. The result is an extreme reaction (no debate) and a complete reversal on transparency. This is a tactic of the bureaucracy to limit outside 'interference' in the decision making process. This is an affront to democracy. Our elected officials need to get a grip on reality. Less than 50% of the population voted in the municipal election. Council's legitimacy is questionable. It's imperative that they keep us informed and seek our feedback throughout their term if they want to maintain any semblance of democracy at City Hall.

+ The huge increase in Access to Information requests over the past few years -- in many cases for information that was not confidential or proprietary -- is an indicator of a steady decrease in transparency at City Hall. [Ref.: <http://ottawa.ca/calendar/ottawa/citycouncil/csedc/2012/04-03/04%20-%20Year%20end%20MFIPPA%20report.htm>]

- + The Mayor has been called a “velvet dictator.” [Ref.: Joanne Chianello, April 12]
Quote: “The mayor promised an era of more transparency. But being told what businesses and services we will and won’t be getting isn’t transparency. It’s government by fiat. If Watson continues in this vein, he’s in danger of becoming known as a velvet dictator, someone who strikes a friendly, even reasonable, tone while suppressing debate on questions of public interest for political expediency. And a velvet dictator would make for a bad mayor.”

- + Is posting 11,000 tweets a good use of the Mayor's time? All but three Councillors and many senior staff members have also joined the Twitterverse. Have they nothing better to do? [Ref.: Capital City News, April 5]

- + Why is the TEEB Manual for Cities -- on how to include ecosystem services in local decision making and policy -- not required reading for Planning Department staff? Why was the Community Sustainability branch dissolved? [Ref.: <http://www.greenspace-alliance.ca/TEEB>] [N.B.: TEEB = The Economics of Ecosystems & Biodiversity.]

- + When will the revised Environmental Strategy surface?

- + When will the draft Wildlife Strategy be released to the City’s Wildlife Strategy Working Group?

- + What good are strategies without implementation and enforcement?

- + Why does the Mayor tolerate it that the Chair of the Community and Protective Services Committee receives a contribution (the maximum \$750) from the taxi drivers union -- AFTER he became chair of that Committee to boot? Why is that not called corruption? [Ref.: Joanne Chianello, April 5 and earlier articles, and editorial]

- + Why is there not better coordination in planning between Ottawa and Gatineau? Is the tri-partite gathering of the mayors of Ottawa and Gatineau with the NCC just an empty routine? Why are the Minutes of those meetings not on the public record? [Ref.: Rupak Chattopadhyay and Gilles Paquet, "The Unimagined Canadian Capital" – <http://www.ottawacitizen.com/business/Ottawa+Gatineau+have+pull+together+create+great+capital+says+recently+published+book/6175946/story.html#ixzz1s4VGGIA8>] Quote: “Metropolitan-scale regional planning in Ottawa-Gatineau must be considered a failure for the past quarter century ... The NCC could have been the central authority for targeted urban transit planning in the NCR, but due to a lack of leadership and vision, it has missed the opportunity.”

- + Kudos: The 2012 Budget fulfilled one of Watson's campaign promises: After a few years of zero contributions (and no money left), the 2012 Budget again allocated \$1.4 million to the fund for buying environmentally sensitive land.

- + Kudos? Infill guidelines for mature neighbourhoods.[Ref.: <http://ottawa.ca/calendar/ottawa/citycouncil/pec/2012/04-10/10%20-%20ACS2012-PAI-PGM-0097%20Low-rise%20Infill%20Housing.htm>]

ROUNDTABLES - A.M.

Growth in Rural Areas

- + When will we see a tree preservation by-law for the rural areas?
- + Is the City prepared to immediately work with the NCC to identify environmental corridors linking the Greenbelt to the City's own natural areas, e.g., the South March Highlands Conservation Forest?
- + The OMB recently endorsed OPA 76's moratorium on country lot estates. (Cavanagh has sought leave to appeal that Decision to Divisional Court.) Is the City prepared to continue that moratorium in the 2014 Official Plan?

Tall Buildings

- + NO to spot zoning. If a developer wishes to deviate from Community Design Plans, the community should be consulted to see if it wishes to modify it. CDPs are not just "Guidelines." [N.B. More on CDPs below.]

Suburban Development

- + When will we see a site alteration by-law? It's been a "direction" in the OP since at least 2003!
- + When will the City's sewer design standards be updated to account for the increasing intensity of storm events in this region? (The definition of a "100-year storm" increased from 88 mm in the 1980s to 107 mm in 2004. Where will we be in 2020, 2040, 2060, when houses being built today may no longer be safe?)
- + OPA 76 resulted in a complete overhaul of flood plain policies to ensure consistency with the Provincial Policy Statement. Essentially, development in the flood plain is now prohibited, except for minor additions and some very limited exceptions that do not include residential development. How is it that development of some 20+ ha of the Carp River flood plain in Kanata West is being proposed through an amendment to the OP - if the OP policies are already consistent with the PPS? [Depending on the response:] Is it the City's intention to continue to allow the development of extensive areas of flood plain simply by allowing amendments to the OP?

ROUNDTABLES P.M.

Transit-oriented development

+ Why is the City not foursquare behind the idea of having ONE transit authority for both sides of the River?

+ Is the City being advised by real experts on LRT? Credible critics say the stations downtown are too far apart.

+ Is the City foolishly giving absolute priority to staying within budget for the LRT? Not having an 'iconic' station at Confederation Square seems like a huge mistake that cannot be undone later. It seems like the same reasoning that has saddled us with an ugly corrugated steel box in front of City Hall to house the Zamboni for the Rink of Dreams.

[Ref.: Joan Chianello, April 20, "In front of City Hall, an eyesore – and a warning."

Quote: "There are generally two ways to go about this sort of thing. Figure out ahead of time what you want to achieve and then cost it out. If the price tag is too rich, adjust the plans. Conversely, you can decide how much you are willing to spend, and then search out the best options for the money. – In this case, neither strategy was followed." And: "Council set the price for building the light-rail system at \$2.1 billion (in 2009 dollars) and now we're racing against time to try to get the project to fit into that preconceived budget, even though many fear the results will come up short.

For weeks, civic and business leaders have said there should be a station at Confederation Square — perhaps the most iconic intersection in the capital, encompassing the National War Memorial, the Government Conference Centre, the Château Laurier and the National Arts Centre.

The sudden move of the Rideau Station from the Elgin Street square to the east side of the Rideau Centre shopping mall caught many off-guard, including the National Capital Commission, which had been working with the city for almost two years on the design on the station.

NCC chairman Russ Mills this week added his voice to a growing chorus of those opining that a station at Confederation Square would befit a national capital. Beyond the location issue, many argue the three stations planned for the downtown core simply aren't enough. Another is needed.

Mayor Jim Watson doesn't think so. Watson has declared that even if he magically found the \$40 or \$50 million it would cost for an extra station, he wouldn't add one because it would slow down the transit system. Many would argue that the small amount of time lost by adding a single extra station would be worth the additional convenience to passengers.

And it's not really true that the city doesn't have the money. It's that council is unwilling to make some hard decisions now that will pay off in the future — as in, after the next election.

Consider that the city recently went through a period of unprecedented infrastructure construction due to the federal and provincial stimulus programs. The Terry Fox Drive extension and the Hazeldean Road widening were sped up because of stimulus spending, and the city found more than \$37 million to spend on them quite quickly. Surely there are capital projects that could be put off to free funds for the LRT.

When describing his "Ottawa on the Move" plan to pave roads and improve cycling lanes, Watson has

said that there's never been a better time to borrow. Which is why the city is taking on an additional \$125 million of debt for the Watson-led initiative.

Why does this philosophy not apply to the LRT, the most important civic project this city has ever undertaken?"]

Community Design Plans

+ Community Design Plans should be a) respected, b) codified in Secondary Plans so that they will have legal standing.

+ Peter Hume is said to have "... put the development community on notice that the city would not be entertaining re-zoning applications for sites where the zoning had already been decided through a community design plan." And is quoted as saying: "We believe that community design plans are incredibly important. They are designed to tell you where height is and is not appropriate. And we believe they are not jumping-off points. Once we complete a community design plan, and we zone appropriately to the heights that are designated in the plan, it's not a jumping-off point for more.

"West Wellington's a great example. We completed a community design plan, and we spent many hours doing it. And we just received an application from Tega Homes to go to 36 storeys. It's totally out of keeping with the community design plan. We believe that we have to respect those community design plans. We're doing them for a purpose, and that purpose is to bring you certainty.

"So I tell you now that when those happen, like Tega Homes who is looking for 36 storeys, the answer is going to be simple: 'No.' It's 'no' at 36 storeys, it's 'no' at 30 storeys, it's 'no' at 25 storeys, it's 'no' at 20 storeys." [Ref.: Joan Chianello, Oct. 11, 2011]

+ Two weeks later, in introducing the 2012 Budget, David Reevely reported that: "A whole section of Watson's speech introducing the city's proposed 2012 budget on Wednesday was devoted to criticizing the city planning process that has led to innumerable neighbourhood fights between developers, who mostly want to build taller and wider buildings than the city's zoning code allows, and existing residents, who mostly want to stop them. " The Mayor is quoted as having said: "Our planning process is not working the way we need it to work," Watson's speech said. "Nobody is happy with the situation. Communities are frustrated, industry is frustrated, staff are frustrated." But, he went on, in a passage where he explicitly identified developers and builders as his target, "some are treating zoning and community design plans as mere suggestions, and that will end." [Ref.: The Citizen, Oct. 28]

+ A day earlier, Reevely reported [Ref.: ("Watson wants 'green express lane' for city permits")]: "Projects will qualify based on planned energy and water efficiency, construction waste minimization, and overall environmental footprint," a city description of the plan says, although there are no specific funds attached to it.

The idea is a response to two frequent criticisms of the city: that planning approvals take too long (though the budget notes with some pride that the number of building permits issued within the legal time limit has gone from 65 per cent five years ago to over 90 per cent); and that city building officials are stymied by new techniques and technology for which they don't already have playbooks. "

"After the budget presentation, Watson also said he hoped to set "benchmarks" in 2012 for how long each phase of a planning approval should take and eventually promise discounts when the city didn't meet those targets.

"Each transaction would have to be different because obviously a site plan for a subdivision is substantially different than putting a veranda on your backyard, so we'd have to judge it accordingly to the scope and magnitude of the project," Watson said.

The head of the city's planning department, John Moser, immediately began lowering the boom on his staff in a mid-afternoon memo obtained by the Citizen. "I am sympathetic to the nature of our profession - of the regulatory role that we play, of the myriad of legislation and interests that we balance every day," he wrote. " But there has never been a greater time to improve our operations than now. We will all be under an increased microscope in 2012 and we must deliver or face collective consequences."

Economic Development

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