



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

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5 September 2013

Re: Official Plan - Comprehensive Five-Year Review, June 25, 2013 Proposal

General comments

The time frame of this Review is too tight to allow for proper public consultation. Important supporting documents such as the draft Transportation Master Plan are not yet available to the public. We understand that Open Houses are planned for September and trust that they will include a staff presentation and a public question & answer period.

We applaud the effort in this proposal to make the text more concise. Verbosity and duplication are a long standing weakness of Ottawa's official plans. There is still further opportunity for tightening up.

Access to Ottawa's Official Plan remains a significant irritant. We wonder if the unavailability of a colour-printed and bound copy of the current Plan is in conformity with Provincial access regulations. On the web site, there is no statement, as one would expect on legal text sites, regarding the most recent Amendment that has been incorporated. There is no PDF of the whole document, making searches extremely cumbersome.

Another long standing weakness of Ottawa's Plans is the failure to monitor performance adequately and comprehensively. The current proposal (section 5.5, p5-16) deletes the reference to an annual Report Card altogether in favour of a "Corporate Planning Framework" that ties together Council priorities, budgets and performance monitoring including long term sustainability goals. Has this Framework, approved in May 2011, yielded any concrete outcomes yet? Rational planning would start with a look-back on what has been achieved through previous Official Plans and draw lessons from that. No evidence of such effort is visible.

The title of the staff report notwithstanding, we would appreciate seeing confirmation that this review constitutes a "comprehensive review" as defined in the Provincial Policy Statement, that the conclusion about no current need for additional urban land applies to both housing and employment lands, and that therefore no appeals to the OMB in this regard are possible if Council accepts staff's recommendation.

Finally, we understand that Annex 12 (re view protection from Beechwood Cemetery) will be re-recognized as part of the legally binding Official Plan, presumably by amending policy 2 of section 5.4.

Natural linkages

In consequence of the January 2012 Terms of Settlement with the Greenspace Alliance additional areas are marked on Schedules L1/2/3 as being part of Ottawa's Natural Heritage System (NHS). This circulation to the public provides no context, rationale or justification for the specific additions. This invites landowners' appeals to the OMB, where the matter will be debated. But that is wrong: The debate should take place now, among the citizens of Ottawa.

The Greenspace Alliance began that debate, by convening a Panel on natural linkages last June. As a follow-up, we were provided with the City's methodology which is posted on our web site along with Dr. Stow's presentation during the Panel discussion. The work performed is impressive. We urge the City to subject it to peer review so that it will stand up to challenges before the OMB.

While we support the proposed additions in principle, we are unable to validate the specifics. The otherwise admirable write-up of the methodology falls short at the very last -- and critical -- step. This final step is absent from the write-up's Figure 1 depicting the process. Staff will need to demonstrate that, within the 1 km-wide corridors, the "black spots" are all that is left to be identified after deducting non-natural land use and lands that were already identified as part of the NHS. Nor is it self-evident that this "solution" meets the standards set out in MNR's Natural Heritage Reference Manual (sections 3 and 12 among others).

The existing L1/2/3 schedules likewise suffer from this lack of transparency (rationale) and documentation. Besides showing Villages and Flood plains, all NHS components are marked a uniform green. As a result, these schedules do not "speak" enough; they can be "read" only if one has access to the various GIS layers, as staff and developers' consultants have. It leaves the public out in the cold. Schedule A has 12 colours; Schedule B has 16 colours; Schedules L1/2/3 can do better than show just one colour.

An Annex to the Plan should list the sources of the data for the L1/2/3 Schedules and their vintage.

At the City's request, the OMB ordered Annex 15 (describing the methodology for assessing candidate urban lands) to be part of the Plan. We are pleased to see that this Annex is now proposed to be an information item only. This is what we had suggested at the time. Still, the Annex needs to be amended because it does not adequately prescribe a process that will systematically recognize and protect components of the Natural Heritage System -- linkages in particular. We urge the City to invite suggestions for amendments now, not wait until the next round of urban expansion when objective analysis may be encumbered by desires to add specific pieces of land.

Finally, we believe that the concept of natural linkages should be extended to urban areas, even if their main purpose is to provide an amenity to humans, not wildlife. The methodology should have incorporated the information available in the 2005/2006 Urban Natural Areas environmental evaluations. More on this under Significant Woodlands below.

Country lot subdivisions

We support the prohibition of new country lot subdivisions (section. 3.7.2, policy 8, p3-42), and the increase of lot severances by 1 (to a total of 3) provided a minimum of 10 ha remains agricultural

land. However, why does this policy reference only General Rural Areas and not Rural Natural Features as well? It should reference both.

We need not spell out here the severe negative impact of country lot subdivisions. We hope that, for the benefit of Councillors and the public, the forthcoming staff report will summarize the arguments put forward as far back as 2003 ("Document 10" remains available on our web site), and again at the Open House held on January 29. An additional point to be made is that the Natural Linkages analysis just completed showed that this type of development is very harmful to the maintenance of ecological connectivity.

The City will be in good company when it finally puts a stop to this form of rural sprawl: We understand that the Region of Waterloo, Halton Region, Hamilton, Essex, Peel, York, Durham, Oxford County, Mississippi Mills, Sudbury, Huron County, Durham, Peel, the Town of Mono, Kawartha Lakes, Port Hope, Deep River, East Luther Grand Valley and Shelburne all, in one way or another, prohibit country lot subdivisions.

We note that the implication of policy 7 of section 2.2.1 (p2-7) is that up to 11,000 people (5,500 households) would settle in country lot subdivisions. Is this consistent with Policy 8 of section 3.7.2?

Two final points: 1) Conservation Subdivisions (p3-44) are proposed to be deleted. The public deserves to hear the story of what happened following this attempt at innovative policy making. 2) Policy 10-d asks only that "The City is satisfied" that the matters in Policy 8 "have been addressed." This should read that they "...have been addressed to the satisfaction of ...".

Rural Natural Features

A policy should be added to section 3.2.4 (p3-9) requiring provision of an RNF overlay in the geoOttawa maps, e.g. under Planning. RNFs are too "invisible." It would benefit all interested parties, when they consult a zoning map, to immediately see where there is an RNF so that they become aware of the consequences such as the requirement for an Environmental Impact Statement.

For the same reason, if they aren't already, RNFs should be included on Schedules L1/2/3, given that the purpose of these Schedules is to serve as a trigger for an EIS requirement.

Definition of Significant Woodland

Current policy 1(c)(iii) in section 2.4.2 allows a woodland to be recognized as significant only if, in addition to age and interior habitat, it also is "adjacent to a surface water feature such as a river, stream, drain, pond or wetland, or any groundwater feature including springs, seepage areas, or areas of groundwater upwelling". This requirement is not supported by the guidance available in the Natural Heritage Reference Manual. We appreciate that the policy was adopted (and approved by the Ministry) before the second edition of the Manual became available but that is why the policy should be adjusted now, so that Ottawa can come into conformity with the Province's expectations.

Water protection is just one of the Manual's Ecological Functions criteria, along with woodland interior, proximity to other woodlands, linkages and woodland diversity. Additional criteria categories, besides Size, are Uncommon Characteristics, and Economic and Social Values.

To some extent, the definition of Significant Woodland is a function of the degree of overall forest cover in the municipality. Several citizens' science projects are under way and near completion that may finally shed light on Ottawa's actual tree cover, especially in urban areas. The City's watershed-based analysis (*Characterization of Ottawa's Watersheds*, March 2011, issued January 2012, likely based on 2009 data) finds that, at 32%, Ottawa just met Environment Canada's objective of 30%. But that is somewhat deceptive because the range across the various subwatersheds is wide -- from 6 to 42%. On an area basis, 43% of the report's Study Area did not achieve the 30% objective, 29% did not meet the 100 m interior habitat objective of 10%, and 84% did not meet the 200 m interior habitat objective of 5%. Moreover, tree cover is being severely depleted as a result of the Emerald Ash Borer invasion. Ottawa's policy to preserve and enhance woodland should therefore be generous, not stingy, especially in subwatersheds where forest cover is below target. This "bias" could be made explicit in a policy.

Nor is there a reason why significant woodlands should be recognized only in rural areas. As the 2005/2006 UNA evaluations attest, there are many woodlots in the urban area that deserve this recognition (and already do if they have achieved Urban Natural Feature status).

We suggest that it is feasible and practical to draw upon the Manual's Uncommon Characteristics criteria in order to more fully recognize woodlands as significant. We propose that the policy read as follows:

(c) Significant woodlands defined ~~in the rural area~~ as woodlands that combine ~~all three~~ two out of four features listed below in a contiguous, forested area:

- (i) Mature stands of trees 80 years of age or older;
- (ii) Interior forest habitat located more than 100 m inside the edge of a forest patch; ~~and~~
- (iii) Woodland adjacent to a surface water feature such as a river, stream, drain, pond or wetland, or any groundwater feature including springs, seepage areas, or areas of groundwater upwelling;
- (iv) Uncommon characteristics such as a unique species composition, a vegetation community with a provincial ranking of S1, S2 or S3 (as ranked by the NHIC); habitat of a rare, uncommon or restricted woodland plant species; or species existing in only a limited number of sites within the planning area.

Including uncommon characteristics as qualification for significance has the additional advantage of allowing inclusion of "legacy" woodlands. They often contain species and combinations of species that are now uncommon but may have been widespread before European settlement. In the name of biodiversity these woodlands deserve to be protected as part of Ottawa's Natural Heritage.

Mineral Aggregate Resources

Like the proposals for additional natural linkages, the proposals for additional land to be set aside for mineral aggregate extraction lack transparency and context. In this case, at least, context is provided in the report *Proposed Official Plan Bedrock Mineral Aggregate Resource Designations*, available on the City's web site.

From that paper one may surmise that the option put forward in the proposed Amendment is its Option 3. However, there are several discrepancies between the associated "Map 4" and Schedules S28 to S31 to the Amendment. For example, several areas proposed to be included according to map 4 are not to be seen on Schedule S28; an area shown on Schedule S31 does not agree with the area shown on Map 4. Exactly how much supply the proposed Amendment would add to the already ample supply is

therefore unclear. All the brief staff report that was tabled on June 25 tells us is that the amount of rural land set aside would nearly double.

The larger question is whether any additional land needs to be sterilized for bedrock resources at all. The paper demonstrates that currently designated (licensed and unlicensed) land provides a 105- to 123-year supply, well beyond the 60 years once suggested by the former Regional Municipality. Option 3 would increase that to 166 to 211 years. Perhaps what is actually proposed in the Amendment is somewhat less but in any case there appears to be no need whatsoever to designate additional lands.

We understand that this is also the overwhelming opinion expressed by landowners and owners of adjacent properties when, in a commendable outreach process, they were informed of the potential of new designations on their or their neighbour's lands.

On proposed text amendments in section 3.7.4, our comments are:

- we support the reference to re-use of materials on p3-51;
- we wonder whether policy 8 (p3-53) implies needless duplication of effort with the Ministry of Natural Resources. What is the City's value-added here? Still, we certainly support the addition of a water balance and a cumulative effects assessment as requirements. As well, we support the addition of "the proposed haul route" as part of the area of influence.

Complete Streets

We understand that the concept of "Complete Streets" will feature in the draft Transportation Master Plan. If so, should there not be a policy in the Official Plan to give that direction legal weight? Such a policy could be inserted in section 2.3.1.

Miscellaneous other comments

- On p1-12, in "Review and approval of development applications..." the words "and approval" should be deleted.
- Re p2-3, Figure 2.2: Why are the actuals for 2006 and 2011 not provided? 2006 data are still "estimated actuals" and those for 2011 are still "projections."
- Re p2-6, first bullet, better wording would be: "The City will preserve natural features and the integrity of natural systems by directing land use and by only approving development ~~in a way and to locations that~~ if it maintains ecosystem functions over time."
- We agree to the change in terminology from density "targets" to "requirements" on p2-14 but note that this is not a change in policy as meeting them was a requirement already.
- Policy 10 (p2-69) appears to give little incentive to develop Community Design Plans. The City should commit to, over time, have CDPs for every neighbourhood.
- We are strongly supportive of stating unequivocally that storm water facilities should stay out of the flood plain (p3-3, policy 11).

- Re p3-32, the definition of Central Area is unclear. Is Sandy Hill in or out? Why is there no map?
- In section 3.7.1 (Villages) under Permitted Uses, policy 7 (p3-40), "parks and natural areas" should be permitted in addition to "public open space".
- The relationship between Volume 1 and Volume 2 of the Official Plan remains confusing, despite the proposed amendments to policy 1 of section 4.1 (p4-2). Setting aside the special treatment given to heights and densities -- policies 2.2.2(6) and (12) give secondary plans the last word on this -- the policy says that secondary plans must conform but may be more restrictive. Can the meaning of "more restrictive" or its opposite, "more permissive," not depend on the context and the objective of the Plan? To avoid misunderstandings and legal disputes, this should be clarified.
- In section 4.2 (p4-3), on the first line for 3.7.2 it states "Heritage Impact Statement required." We think this should be "Environmental Impact Statement," given that it is about adjacency to a feature of the natural heritage system.
- Re p5-3, policy 2: What is the point of repeating section 2 of the *Planning Act* almost verbatim? Why is subsection "c" truncated and a new subsection "d" added with wording that differs from the *Act*? Why is "including affordable housing" in subsection "l" omitted?
- Re p5-7, policy 2: Is publication in 1 English and 1 French newspaper good enough? We noticed that some advertisements have begun to re-appear in community papers. Why not make a commitment to publishing all notices in the community newspapers as the City used to do?
- Re Schedule S25, while re-designating the Poole Creek corridor between West Ridge and Jonathan Pack from General Urban Area to Major Open Space would be an improvement, we suggest that a more proper designation would be Urban Natural Feature. Poole Creek is one of the few remaining Brown Trout creeks in the city.
- The staff report calls the proposed change depicted in Schedule S25 "housekeeping." Another housekeeping change should be to the boundaries of the UNF just west of Stittsville Main Street, north of Poole Creek: It should be right on the corridor; there should be no General Urban Area between it and Poole Creek.
- Re Schedule S26, the larger part of the land proposed to be redesignated from General Urban to Major Open Space is what is left of the Stittsville Wetlands Complex. We suggest that the wetland part be designated Urban Natural Feature rather than MOS.
- Also on Schedule S26, the wetland and Feedmill Creek continue west past Overland. Why does the protective designation not continue?