



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

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Submission to Environment Committee

The Greenspace Alliance sees no shortage of issues at all levels of government that directly relate to its mandate -- advocating for the protection and enhancement of green and blue spaces in the national capital area. But for once, at the occasion of the February 17 inaugural meeting of the City's Standing Committee on the Environment at the start of a new term of Council, we will cover a broader canvas.

First and foremost, we submit that this Committee should bring back to life the 50-year strategic plan delivered to Council two years ago. The ***Choosing Our Future reports*** were brought to your predecessor Committee on the 21st of February 2012 and flipped to Council the next day, then never seen or heard from again. The team that had put this plan together -- in a rare but highly desirable joint effort by Ottawa, Gatineau and the National Capital Commission -- was disbanded and key people retired. The three reports are available only if you dig deep into the Minutes of those meetings.(*). Printed copies apparently are as rare as hens' teeth.

(*). One must go to <http://ottawa.ca/calendar/ottawa/citycouncil/ec/2012/02-21/03-ACS2012-ICS-CSS-0005%20Feb%202012.htm> and scroll to the end of the report.

These reports, which follow the general framework of the Natural Step methodology, are very well structured, and are replete with excellent perspectives and ideas -- including "catalyst projects" -- suggesting how to proceed in order to move this municipality closer to a sustainable future. The reports should be re-issued and made widely available. They were intended to start a conversation with the public, politicians and staff. The need for such a conversation remains. Their scope includes social development, transportation and risk management, subjects which are largely outside the scope of this Committee, but there is plenty of meat that falls squarely within your mandate.

That should be your starting point for directing staff to develop, with the community, a plan for short- and medium term implementation. Let's call that the long-awaited "refresh" of the City's **Environment Strategy**.

(On May 20, 2014 [senior management presented](#) to your predecessor Committee a status report on this Strategy. As an inventory of past and current initiatives it was useful but it gave no indication of the way forward except by proposing "more of the same." The good citizens of Ottawa deserve better.)

Staff could also benefit from guidelines contained in the 2011 [*TEEB Manual for Cities*](#), developed in conjunction with ICLEI (Local Governments for Sustainability), and [*Getting to Carbon Neutral - A Guide for Canadian Municipalities*](#), published in 2010 by Toronto & Region Conservation.

Continuing with LRT expansion, persevering with the Ottawa River Action Plan, and continuing support for an Ottawa Centre EcoDistrict, naturally will be part of such a 2-, 5-, 10- and 20-year strategy. Here are some elements which, in our view, also are high priorities for such a plan.

- + Staff should be given the resources to produce well-documented and accessible **data** about Ottawa's physical environment. A good start was made with [*Characterization of Ottawa's Watersheds*](#) and the [*Natural Landscape Linkages Analysis*](#). This work needs to be kept up to date, built upon, and made more accessible. The various data layers of the L Schedules of the Official Plan (depicting elements of Ottawa's Natural Heritage System) must be made available on geoOttawa.
- + A **Solid Waste Strategy** has been held ransom to the Plasco fiasco and the dispute with Orgaworld also hurts performance. Making the recycling of household plastic possible should be a priority. An 80% diversion rate of all residential solid waste is achievable; we have a way to go when it comes to high rise and other multi-unit structures. Even on the ICI [Industrial-Commercial-Institutional] waste stream the City is not without options, all the while continuing to lobby the Province for a greater say in the licensing of facilities. The second *Choosing Our Future* report (p52) mentions that the three Partners are working on a long-range waste management strategy. Where is it?
- + **Liquid waste** (human sewage) management needs to be re-thought. Alternatives to continuously expanding the single sewage treatment facility - Robert O. Pickard Environmental Centre (ROPEC) in Beacon Hill North - need to be seriously considered. Is there any city in the world with a million inhabitants that relies on a single sewage treatment centre? A cost-benefit analysis of alternatives is needed to determine the optimum configuration.
- + A related fundamental re-think of sewage is of special concern to rural villages. The City's insistence that only **big pipes** will do -- but then there is no money for big pipes -- should end. For example, neither Osgoode village nor Greely are able to develop on city services, nor is Metcalf or any rural Ottawa village that does not already have the big pipe. There are numerous tertiary treatment plant technologies that exceed the environmental parameters of the ROPEC secondary treatment plant. The City should embrace communal sewage facilities so that our small and medium sized villages can develop and attain sustainable densities which can support a larger retail commercial base.
- + The strategic plan should look for opportunities to apply **Low Impact Development (LID)** practices to storm water management. As Kitchener-Waterloo is doing, Ottawa could promote charging for storm water infrastructure in proportion to the amount of impermeable surface. A 2012 [U.S. Environmental Protection Agency study](#) of 17 LID case studies around the country found that, in the majority of cases, total capital cost savings ranged from 15 to 80 percent. [*The Umbrella*](#) is an online tool designed to promote knowledge-sharing and collaboration on stormwater and other green infrastructure issues. It is hosted and managed by [Green Communities Canada](#), a national association of local organizations that help people go green. Green infrastructure is now officially encouraged in the Provincial Policy Statement and its applications should become standard fare in any public or private developments.

- + At least three major road widening projects are on the horizon at present: for the Airport Parkway and Lester Road, and for Old Richmond Road and March Road. These roads and others traverse significant wetlands. We will expect no less than that best practices in **Road Ecology** are implemented. There is growing expertise, both locally, provincially and nationally, on how to preserve and enhance connectivity for wildlife. The time to apply it is when a major road investment is made. Beyond legal requirements regarding endangered species, the concern is for all forms of wildlife.
- + A long-promised **Forest Strategy** would bring more coherence and discipline to the operations of the City's Forestry department. The record of survival of street trees is abysmal; widely available best practices for planting and maintaining street trees are not followed. Transparency and accountability, for the Emerald Ash Borer strategy and more broadly, is a rare sight.
- + The City's **Wildlife Strategy** continues to be a work in progress. A clear and straightforward conflict management strategy remains elusive. Don't let action on this strategy slide to Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee -- the overwhelming percentage of conflicts arise in urban areas. A draft Wildlife Protection Protocol during Construction is currently being circulated; when finalized, given that it will become part of the development review process, Planning Committee is an appropriate destination; however, should ARAC express an interest, then Environment Committee must too. Wildlife issues are an urban/suburban issue far more than it is a rural one.
- + Rounding out Forest and Wildlife strategies could be a **Biodiversity Strategy**. From backyards to major conservation forests and everything in between, much can be done to promote healthy ecosystems.
- + We hope to see in the 2015 Budget a return to a permanent, dedicated allocation for the acquisition of **environmentally sensitive lands**. If not, we expect this Committee to argue for it in ensuing budgets. More broadly, a long-suggested policy to lever City funds with other financing sources such as land trusts, as well as a pro-active effort to engage in or facilitate easement and stewardship agreements, should finally see the light of day and be supported by Council and a budget.
- + During the election, the Mayor promised a **site alteration by-law**. As this is an environmental protection measure, it should come to this Committee when ready. It is absolutely vital that the City protect wetlands and forest remnants to the maximum extent possible. A **rural tree protection by-law** remains highly desirable as well.
- + The Committee should do what it can to beef up implementation of both the **Air Quality/Climate Change** and **Water Environment Strategy** plans. If the proposals put forward at the end of last Council's term are any indication, we should expect little in the 2015 Budget. You should lay the groundwork for a more robust approach.
- + One of the *Choosing Our Future* reports is devoted specifically to development of an **Energy Strategy**. Other municipalities have shown that cities can have a very strong influence here. This includes coming up with ways of facilitating the financing of a retrofit program for buildings. The report notes that in 2007 buildings were responsible for 75% of the Region's energy use and 62% of our GHG emissions. It asserts that adopting best practices could result in a long term reduction in energy consumption by half and in GHG emissions by 2/3 compared to the historical trend.

+ Another of the *Choosing Our Future* reports devotes a section to **Food and Agriculture**, outlining seven strategies. Several of these are consistent with the City's plans and practices, others could be pursued more aggressively. There is much opportunity here to work with the NCC, witness the support for agriculture in the new Greenbelt Master Plan.

Eco-system services should be considered in all City decision making. Some of us dream of Council being a super-Sustainability Committee, so that all decisions would be looked at through a sustainability lens. To have environmental or sustainability issues "take their place in line like recreation and transportation does," as your former Chair publicly asserted last year, reveals a fundamental misunderstanding of the challenges that are before us.

Even more fundamentally, as one of our members wrote to you recently, "each resident of the land -- human being, animal, plant, soil, air-climate, water, mineral and rock form -- is part of our lives in many significant ways" and needs to be respected on its own terms. The environment is not here just for our exclusive use and exploitation.

Ultimately, achieving a sustainable city is the work of all of us. The City should support any citizen science projects that crop up in the city. Its public engagement practices should be vastly improved. We could say much about ways of working with a meaningful Environmental Sustainability Advisory Committee but will save that for another day.

We issue a challenge to this Committee to address the issues on a comprehensive, coherent and strategic basis, always minding how the City can become more sustainable over the long term. You may count on us to assist you in any way we can.

Erwin Dreessen

Co-chair

Founded in 1997, the Greenspace Alliance works with members of the community to preserve and enhance green and blue spaces in the National Capital area. It engages with all levels of government. We believe that urban greenness is essential for a community's quality of life, contributing to our personal, social, economic, cultural and spiritual well-being. It also connect us with the natural and cultural history of our region.