

_The Coalition
Canadian Architect
Canadian Society of Landscape Architects (CSLA)
Heritage Ottawa

Canadian Institute of Planners (CIP)
Ontario Association of Architects (OAA)
Royal Architectural Institute of Canada (RAIC)

June 22nd, 2015

Open letter to:
Russell Mills
Chairman
National Capital Commission
40 Elgin Street
Ottawa ON K1P 1C7

Re: Leadership in relation to the Memorial to the Victims of Communism

Dear Mr. Mills,

In 1998, Marcel Beaudry, former Chairman and CEO of the National Capital Commission, came under fire from the Ottawa Citizen - a respected newspaper of which you were the publisher.

You will recall that Mr. Beaudry had proposed transforming Metcalfe Street into a grand allée - a plan which would have substantially damaged the quality of Metcalfe Street and the Capital overall. This proposal was endorsed by the prime minister of the day, but it also elicited strong and sustained public outcry. Mr. Beaudry, the NCC board and its political overseers, in the end, heard the public and abandoned the proposal. Whether they ultimately agreed with the public or not is a moot point. Project Metcalfe Street did not happen.

Now, as Mr. Beaudry's successor, it appears that you are experiencing similar pressure from the media and public. The public outcry and media coverage surrounding the proposed location for the Memorial to the Victims of Communism have been relentless and clear.

The message to the NCC has been consistent: rescind the decision to place the monument on the site reserved for a federal courthouse, and negotiate another site for the project.

There is precedent for such a change: the NCC has already reversed an earlier decision to place the monument on a site across the road, also on the ceremonial route of Wellington Street.

There are strong public and professional objections to the gift of a site valued at \$16 to \$30 million set aside for a federal court. In addition, at least \$13 million had been expended preparing plans for the federal justice building that was to occupy the site. If that site is given to a large-scale monument, those millions of taxpayer dollars will have been wasted.

No one is asking the federal government to build the federal court now. The site was approved for a federal court by the NCC as part of a comprehensive plan that the NCC co-funded with Public Works Canada in 1987, and re-affirmed with the NCC's approval of the 2006 Plan Update. The 2006 update demonstrated new infrastructure under the federal court building, and harmonized the symbolism, security, servicing, public health and safety facilities, visitor welcome area and infrastructure of the Parliamentary and Judicial precincts between Portage Bridge and Rideau Canal.

The proposed location of the Memorial to the Victims of Communism on this site lays waste to the plans for the Judicial Precinct and destroys, therefore, the intentions of the entire plan, approved by the NCC and by Prime Minister Stephen Harper's government. The current public and professional outrage is directed at this very poor planning, management and business decision.

Moreover a federal court building in this location will help visually conceal the Cliff Street Central Heating Plant, an important but unsightly piece of infrastructure. In contrast, the proposed Memorial to the Victims of Communism will leave the Cliff Street Plant visible from the ceremonial route. These sight lines and scale considerations should, of course, also inform the NCC's planning and design decisions on the siting of any monument.

The City of Ottawa recently passed a motion asking the federal government to relocate the Memorial to the Victims of Communism. Canadians value their Parliament and their courts. That either Parliament or the courts should be asked to play second fiddle to a monument—any monument—is outrageous. Anyone who dismisses a courthouse as “yet another government building” and fails to mention its importance as a keystone to our justice system affronts our Canadian democracy.

Consultations, discussions and decisions affecting the future of Canada's Capital should not be driven by political expediency. The parliamentary and judicial precincts are not a playground for the whim of the moment. We ask you and your Board to show leadership and reinstate the plans for the federal courthouse in its intended location noted in the Site Capacity and Long Term Development Plan for Ottawa's Parliamentary and Judicial Precincts - 2006 Plan Update. A prestigious location for the Memorial to the Victims of Communism can be found elsewhere: it can hardly be argued that the Capital does not offer a number of outstandingly beautiful, prestigious and accessible sites. The NCC has the resources to guide such decisions.

We urge you to address this matter directly with the Prime Minister of Canada in your respective fiduciary capacities as the stewards of the National Capital Region, to find a win-win solution for all parties. Listen to the people of Canada. Use your authority to defend the approved Vision and Long Term Development Plan for Canada's Parliamentary and Judicial Precincts. Exercise your leadership to guide the approval of a different site for the Memorial to the Victims of Communism.

Respectfully,

Members of the Coalition
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