

26 October 2017

at the Domaine de la Ferme Moore, 670 Blvd Alexandre-Taché, Gatineau

Dear Friends,

It is a pleasure to see you all here. And a great thank-you to Paul Johanis who, singlehandedly!, has put this celebration together.

Twenty years surely brings back memories, of Shelley Parlow, our first chair; Barbara Barr; the late Bill Royds; Bryan Hawley, who was one of the four who came together in 1997 and said we needed an alliance; he sends his regrets and wishes us many more years. Another former chair, Carol Gudz, also sent her regrets and wishes, as did Lorne Peterson, a contributor of the earliest hour who helped craft words of our mandate, which endures.⁽¹⁾

What we all wanted and want still is change. Various models present themselves. Ken McRae is an example of the lone ranger who, through sheer determination and focus, and meticulous documentation, gets governments to move. At the other extreme is Ecology Ottawa which has, in ten years, assembled a mailing list of 10,000 and can fill the Aberdeen Pavillion. And then there are little outfits like us. All three are valid approaches, in my view.

So what did we achieve? Some excerpts from Annual reports on the display board try to catch some of the flavour. Metrics are hard to come by. Bill Royds once calculated that, from the first to the second draft of the new Ottawa's first Official Plan, one-third of the changes were a result of our comments. Sticking with the Poets' Pathway idea certainly also has borne fruit, later largely as a result of the great efforts by Jane Moore and her Committee.

But in the end, the achievements are not what is driving us. The motivation is exercising our responsibility as citizens, taking what is before us at face value and expressing our considered views on it. As Sol Shuster more than once reminded us: If not us, who?

Three musts have been essential in all we have ever done:

+ network, network, network. The little band of Directors or even the wider group of Members is not enough. We are an alliance -- across members and friends, with other individuals and groups. Attending meetings, face-to-face interaction, builds mutual trust and is indispensable. Some of our most useful roles over the years have been to connect fellow residents with others ("Do you know who...?");

1 "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 connects us with the natural and cultural history of our region."

Lorne also took the photograph of the Large-flowered Trillium which adorns our internet presence and brochure. We thought it a fitting symbol because, while it is (in stylized form) strongly identified with Ontario, the photo was actually taken in Quebec.

+ transparency, and creating a record. With allowance for discretion at times, what we think, say and decide is there for anyone to see. Under this principle I put bending over backwards to have at least two people participate in consultations or lobbying. And without a record, what is learned disappears as people and events move on and an key objective of forming the alliance -- to learn from and support each other -- would be lost;

+ due diligence. This is a primary responsibility of members of the Board. By the way, you can't delegate due diligence to the lawyers. It is ironic that the two times we got into trouble and had to re-incorporate in order to protect future revenues were brought about by inappropriate advice from lawyers that the Board did not catch;

Much rests on the shoulders of the chair. He/she often plants the seed or creates a first draft and usually ultimately executes. But he/she needs the active buy-in from the Board and others if their role is to be sustainable.

Let's move forward! I think Paul is right that we're in a new era as far as urban expansion is concerned and hence what constitutes the current threat to losing greenspace. The industry is still trying to absorb the additions to the urban area of the round before OPA 76. Walton is trying to divest itself of its huge parcels of agricultural/rural land in the southwest of Ottawa, presumably because they see no chance of a payoff soon. Landowners will keep trying, of course, but the more imminent threats may now come from how the build-out on the current expansion lands will be implemented. Small pockets in the urban area, including back- and frontyards, will also continue to be under pressure. So a strategy of nurturing relationships with developers and of documenting greenspaces in the urban area seems appropriate.

Keep up the struggle, with courage and fortitude.

Erwin Dreessen
(edited from delivery)